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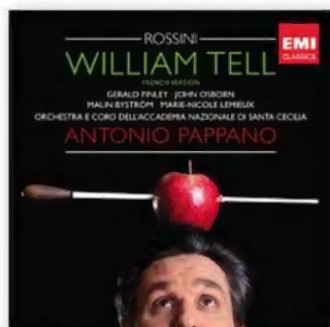
Ten works from his  
magnificent decade





# Best of the year

from EMI and Virgin Classics



## Antonio Pappano

Antonio Pappano and the choir and orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia present Rossini's final French opera seria, *William Tell*, recorded live in concert in Rome.



## Diana Damrau

Soprano Diana Damrau presents Richard Strauss' songs. Favourites such as *Ständchen*, *Wiegenlied*, and *Allerseelen* feature alongside more rarely heard numbers.



## Simon Rattle

Following the release of the complete Brahms symphonies, Sir Simon Rattle and the Berliner Philharmoniker have recorded a programme of orchestral works by Arnold Schoenberg.



## Kate Royal

This song cycle charts a young girl's journey of love and loss in four chapters: Waiting, Meeting, Wedding and Betrayal. It combines German Lieder, English and American songs and French melodies.



## Alexandre Tharaud

The imaginative French pianist performs a selection of Domenico Scarlatti's captivating keyboard sonatas, drawing inspiration from developments in historically informed performance.



## Joyce DiDonato

DiDonato takes full advantage of the vocal and gender range of the mezzo repertoire, voicing not only the eager young men of her many "trouser" roles but also passionate heroines.



## Christina Pluhar

L'Arpeggiata, the multi-faceted ensemble led by Christina Pluhar, brings its "unrivalled instrumental and vocal virtuosity" to Monteverdi's *Vespro della Beata Vergine*.



## The John Wilson Orchestra

World renowned conductor and arranger John Wilson leads an all-star cast of singers and his eponymous orchestra on this recording of the best-loved songs from Hollywood's Golden Age.



## Quatuor Ebène

After their award-winning debut CD of Debussy, Ravel and Fauré, a Brahms programme and the pop-jazz *Fiction*, the quartet turns to two of Mozart's Haydn Quartets and the *Divertimento* KV 138.



# Sounds of America

Gramophone's guide to the classical scene in the US and Canada



Focus David Zinman at 75 – page I » The Scene Musical highlights – page IV » Reviews – page IX

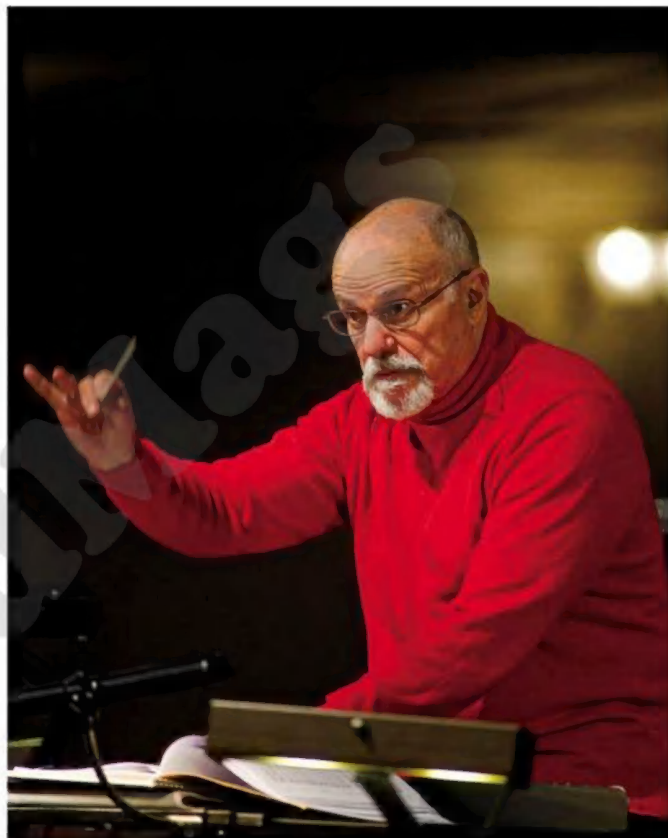
## LEADING LIGHT

At 75, David Zinman continues to drive the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra forwards with his youthful curiosity, as Michael McManus discovers

When David Zinman turned 75 in July, the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra, which he has led since 1995, laid on quite a party for him. At a concert the night before his birthday, pianist Radu Lupu and violinist Julia Fischer played and Alfred Brendel read some of his own poetry, thanking Zinman for providing the 'many beautiful tones of a rare musical harmony'. The great and the good of Zurich assembled to honour a man who had restored the standing of Switzerland's oldest orchestra, which had previously fallen into disrepair in the absence of a committed music director.

I meet Zinman several months on, in a Zurich that's sunny yet autumnal, as he is about to travel to the Far East with the orchestra. The programmes will include Mahler's Symphony No 5 and Brahms's Symphony No 2, which receives a sprightly performance in the Tonhalle first. Zinman likens this latter piece to the film *Babette's Feast*, because 'each course is simply better than the one before'. Other orchestras from the German-speaking world have struggled to persuade their players to play in Japan since the earthquake there raised the spectre of radiation leaks. Only four Tonhalle players have exercised their entitlement to withdraw – a testament to the ethos Zinman has built. When Zinman agreed to extend his Zurich contract to 2014, he described the Tonhalle as his 'last love'. He has evidently won over the orchestra and, just as importantly, their powerful patrons within the upper echelons of Zurich society with his combination of musical mastery and self-deprecating charm. 'I'm your friend,' he explained when he first introduced himself to the musicians, 'but I'm also your boss.' He no longer feels any need to be overly demonstrative in rehearsals, for these players know what he wants. Sometimes he stops conducting altogether and lets the musicians play, while somehow remaining the controlling mind. He deploys humour to good effect, too. 'Just a little more *grausam*,' he once implored. It is little wonder they adore him here.

Few, if any, great conducting reputations can be separated from particular tenures as music director: think of Sergey Koussevitzky in Boston, Fritz Reiner in Chicago, George Szell in Cleveland and



PHOTOGRAPHY: PRISKA KETTERER LUZERN

Leonard Bernstein in New York; and, more recently, Michael Tilson Thomas in San Francisco, Simon Rattle in Birmingham and Berlin and Mariss Jansons in Oslo, Amsterdam and Munich. Guest conducting may bring superstardom and a taste of the high life, but few, if any, maestros really find their life's purpose on the road or in the air. Zinman certainly believes in commitment. His two decades with Zurich follow 13 years with the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, 11 at the Rochester Philharmonic and 13 at the helm in Baltimore. This demonstrates the patience and application of this most genial and modest of maestros, but now his reputation is truly – and deservedly – taking wing. Fittingly for the 21st century, it is recordings that have spread the word about there being something special happening in a city usually associated more with banking than with music-making.

For his recent Mahler cycle, Zinman followed his preferred way of playing the works in concert before recording in studio conditions – in the excellent acoustic of the Tonhalle. The Swiss press commended the cycle both for its musical virtues and for what one critic described as 'a sound quality one can scarcely believe to be possible'. Much of Zinman's love of Mahler can be attributed to his time in London as assistant to Pierre Monteux. He still recalls with pleasure the famous LSO of the early 1960s, with players smoking at rehearsals and,



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## COMO HOTELS AND RESORTS





one particularly cold morning, the classic London fog advancing into the rehearsal hall itself. He experienced Mahler's symphonies at first hand under the likes of Klemperer (No 2), Horenstein (No 3) and Solti (No 4).

What this excellent Mahler cycle can't do, however, is repeat the shock quality of the famous Beethoven cycle from the same stable a decade ago. Suddenly a set of those all-too-familiar symphonies appeared to achieve that magical and elusive combination of modern playing techniques and the energy and scholarly proprieties of the 'authentic' movement. Zinman first attempted to conduct the Beethoven symphonies in accord with the composer's own metronome markings two decades earlier, initially in Rochester in the mid-1970s and then with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra between 1985 and 1998. When he brought three of the symphonies to Carnegie Hall in 1988, he was taking them at a pace that many of his older colleagues had believed to be technically impossible. 'Beethoven was not an idiot,' said Zinman at the time. 'I think he knew what he wanted. It's just that we can't believe from our distance that people played it that fast, because we have been lumbering along since Wagner's time.'

For those celebrated Arte Nova recordings, Zinman was certainly grateful for his good fortune in being able to record 'with an orchestra that can do it', but he also had another trump card, namely a hall he describes as 'an instrument in itself'. 'In this hall you can play very crisply and very short and it still has a nice ring to it and the music continues... We try to understand together how to play music fast but not make it sound overheated. I found I had to create a pulse that is slow. The orchestra feels an inner animation from these speeds, because it forces them to play with an intensity they don't otherwise get. That's what you hear on those recordings. We did full-movement takes, as a first master. Then we listened and made a second master, also complete. The next takes are long bits and then, if you just don't have something, you do little inserts and that's it.' Zinman is also very proud

## *'Playing the same piece again and again with different orchestras during a season? I hate that'*

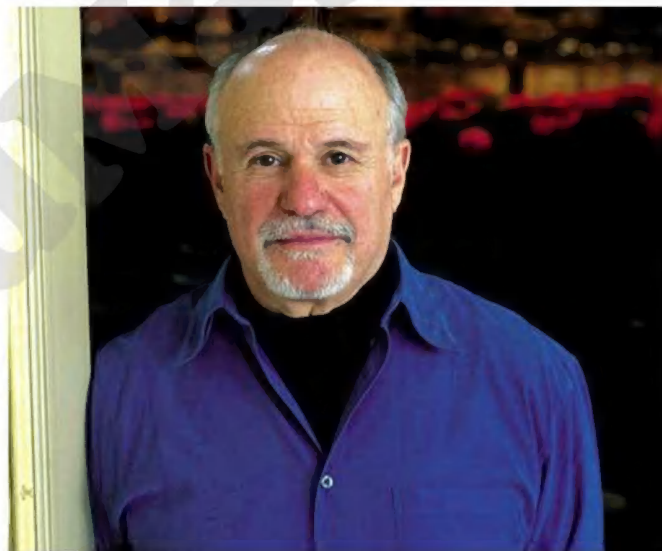
of a new three-CD set of the Brahms symphonies – his first ever live recordings. 'There are advantages and disadvantages to live recording,' he says. 'Generally, in a live performance the orchestra plays with great excitement and panache, but they tend to overplay as well. In big, long works they also get tired towards the end. In a session, you can take the hard parts and do them first and you can cultivate certain things differently after hearing a playback. Sessions are much more like making a movie and live concerts are like being in the theatre.'

For the Brahms set, Zinman and the orchestra had to make a virtue out of necessity, because their record label had no appetite for taking a Brahms cycle into the studio. At the instigation of the orchestra's board president, they recorded the concerts across two evenings with their regular recording team, did some patching and then offered the finished product to BMG, who seized it gladly. 'I've been playing these symphonies over the years with the Tonhalle Orchestra and we have a deep understanding of them,' says Zinman. 'The Tonhalle is a very old hall. You can hear lots of creaks and the audience can be very noisy, but Elmar [Weingarten, Intendant at the Tonhalle] came out beforehand and made a very funny speech, saying how nice it would be if they really didn't contribute to the recording in any way.' He believes the recordings work because the musicians are 'comfortable with what they're doing and the interpretation... What we do is something that's been cultivated over the years... it's the same as with Beethoven, Schumann and Mahler.'

Zinman has made 50 appearances with the New York Philharmonic since he first conducted it in June 1973. This spring, during the first three weeks of March, he returns to lead The Modern Beethoven: A Philharmonic Festival. He will conduct six of the symphonies (numbers 1-4, 7 and 8) in pairs across 11 concerts. Each programme will also include a 20th-century concerto: Stravinsky's *Capriccio* for piano and orchestra, Barber's Cello Concerto and Hartmann's *Concerto funèbre* for violin and strings. 'Alan Gilbert wants to put another way of thinking into that orchestra,' explains Zinman. 'When I first came to Zurich we invited a lot of period-type conductors... There was always the influx of these other ideas... There was always this idea the players would be flexible... The musicians are getting younger and younger – so they haven't grown up with Furtwängler, they've grown up with John Eliot Gardiner.'

At 75, Zinman certainly retains his sense of musical curiosity: 'I am always interested in doing new stuff. Playing the same piece again and again with different orchestras during a season? I hate that. I like to have different pieces throughout the season, so I am not repeating myself. It's harder, but more interesting.'

I have no doubt that Zinman, the orchestra and Beethoven will set Avery Fisher Hall ablaze. Zinman is truly 75 years young; I leave Zurich hoping – and believing – that the best is yet to come for him. **G**



PHOTOGRAPHY: PRISKA KETTERER LUZERN

## ZINMAN ON ZINMAN

Four recommended recordings

**Mahler Symphony No 9**  
Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra /  
David Zinman  
RCA ② ⑧ 88697 72690-2

'I was quite happy, especially with the last movement.'

**Beethoven:  
Symphony No 3, 'Eroica'.  
Symphony No 4**  
Zurich Tonhalle

Orchestra / David Zinman  
Arte Nova Classics  
③ 74321 59214-2

'I like all the Beethoven symphonies, but No 4 has something very special about it, I think – especially as far as speeds and drive are concerned, capturing the character of it. This is the most successful record I have made.'

**Brahms:  
Symphonies Nos 1-4**  
Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra  
/ David Zinman

RCA ② 88697 93349-2  
'Really really nice. It's actually the first live recording I ever made. I like No 2 very much – and No 1, No 3 and No 4, too.'

**Elgar: Violin Concerto**  
Gil Shaham vn  
Chicago Symphony  
Orchestra / David Zinman

Canary Classics ⑦ CCO6  
'This is on Shaham's own label. I think he loved doing it. It's my other live recording... It was for the radio and the engineer who did the editing is a good guy and he managed to make a really good live recording.'





# THE SCENE

Philip Glass celebrates his 75th birthday at Carnegie Hall; at last, Riccardo Chailly conducts the Boston Symphony (in Prokofiev, Debussy and Stravinsky); and *Moby Dick* comes to Calgary

## NEW YORK

### Carnegie Hall

#### The Met Orchestra (January 15)

#### American Composers Orchestra (January 31)

It's a good month for US music at Carnegie Hall: The Met's principal conductor (and, if rumours are to be believed, James Levine's future successor) Fabio Luisi brings the opera orchestra south a few blocks for its annual set of concerts above the pit. On showcase here is current principal clarinetist Anthony McGill and former principal Stephen Williamson (now chairing the clarinet for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra) trading off with concertos by Copland and Corigliano. After lieder by Mahler, soprano Renée Fleming samples Barber's two famous operas, *Vanessa* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, with a brief pit stop in Bernard Herrmann's *Wuthering Heights*. At the end of the month, the ACO celebrates Philip Glass's 75th birthday on the actual anniversary of his birth with the US premiere of the Carnegie co-commissioned Symphony No 9, preceded by the New York premiere of Arvo Pärt's piano concerto and, in the composer's words, 'lament...for the living,' *Lamentate*. Dennis Russell Davies leads the orchestra, with Maki Namekawa on piano for the Pärt.

[carnegiehall.org](http://carnegiehall.org)

## NEW YORK

### Metropolitan Opera

#### Götterdämmerung (January 27 – February 11)

Robert Lepage's controversial (and increasingly creaky) *Ring* cycle comes full circle with the fourth, and longest, instalment. Commonly referred to as 'the Machine', Lepage's set – consisting of 24 planks and clocking in at 45 tonnes – will, it is promised, be used to its fullest extent in this six-hour extravaganza. Given the vertical rainbow bridge in *Rheingold*, galloping abstract horses in *Die Walküre* and rather inconsequential 3D imagery in *Siegfried*, it'll be a tall order. Replacing the increasingly beleaguered James Levine, and thus marking the first complete *Ring* that hasn't been led by Levine since 1989, Fabio Luisi conducts a cast that includes Deborah Voigt in her continued role debut as Brünnhilde, Eric Owens as Alberich, Hans-Peter König as Hagen and Waltraud Meier as Waltraute. Tenor Jay Hunter Morris, a pinch-hitter for the title-role in *Siegfried* at the Met last fall, returns as the fearless forger.

[metopera.org](http://metopera.org)



Deborah Voigt: brings her first Brünnhilde to the Met

## DALLAS

### The Dallas Symphony Orchestra

#### Goulding plays Sibelius (January 19-22)

Now 19, Caroline Goulding has begun gracefully to shed her child prodigy status and is happily coming into her own as a skilled musician with impressive potential. She took home the Avery Fisher Career Grant last year and, with her 1720 Stradivarius in tow, brings the sonic Northern Lights of Sibelius's Violin Concerto to the Lone Star State under the directorship of DSO debutant Pietari Inkinen. A virtuosic violinist in his own right and music director of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, Inkinen shows off his captivating talent for the music of his

native land (heard on several Naxos releases) with Sibelius's Symphony No 5. Starting the programme is *Manhattan Trilogy* by Einojuhani Rautavaara, a living link in Finland's vast and rich music scene between Sibelius and the contemporary likes of Magnus Lindberg and Kaija Saariaho.

[dallassymphony.com](http://dallassymphony.com)

## BOSTON

### Boston Symphony Orchestra

#### Prokofiev, Debussy and Stravinsky (January 19-24)

Hard to believe it, but this concert will mark the first time Italian maestro Riccardo Chailly takes

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARCO BORGREVE, GREG HELGESON





Jacques Lacombe: exploring the elements in New Jersey



the podium at Symphony Hall with Boston's finest. He doesn't hold back with the musical offerings, plunging into Prokofiev's alternatively sly and bombastic suite from *The Love of Three Oranges* as an aural *amuse-bouche*. The programme kicks into high gear with the Debussy's rare ballet score *Khamma*, an Egyptologist's dream infused with the influences of 20th-century exoticism and impressionism. Music from that era continues with Stravinsky's riotous *The Rite of Spring*, a titanic work befitting Chailly's equally indomitable personality.

[bso.org](http://bso.org)

## PRINCETON, NEWARK AND NEW BRUNSWICK

### New Jersey Symphony Orchestra

#### Fire: Light & Legend (January 20-22)

Last year, in its inaugural season under music director Jacques Lacombe, the NJSO explored the shape-changing elements of water in its winter festival. They go further into the elements this year with *Man & Nature*, a three-concert series that explores the manifold facets of fire in music (other programmes earlier in the month included the Magic Fire Music and closing farewell from *Die Walküre*, in which Wotan surrounds his Valkyrie child Brünnhilde in a ring of flames, *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire* by Scriabin, and devilish selections from operas such as *Faust*, *Der Freischütz* and *Orpheus in the Underworld*). The meatiest line-up, however, comes with the finale. Lacombe and his company return to the myth of the fire-stealing Titan with Beethoven's ballet *The Creatures of Prometheus*, featuring dancers and actors in the story-telling role. Preceding the piece is Haydn's *Fire* Symphony No 9 and Kaija Saariaho's searing cello concerto *Notes on Light*, the latter played by Finnish soloist Anssi Karttunen.

[njsymphony.org](http://njsymphony.org)

## EDMONTON

### Edmonton Symphony Orchestra

#### Haydn's Trumpet Concerto (January 22)

A trio of bright young things take over Alberta for an afternoon showcase. Canadian Music Competition laureate Scott MacIsaac, a soft-spoken and unassuming young man offstage who morphs into a commanding presence at the keyboard, here takes on Liszt's Piano Concerto No 2. Principal

trumpeter Robin Doyon has his own solo moment with Haydn's iconic and effervescent Trumpet Concerto. Also on the docket are Andrew Reid's *Echoes of Time*, a work produced through the orchestra's 2011 Young Composers Project, along with Sibelius's *Valse triste* and Schumann's final Symphony No 4, under the assured baton of resident conductor, Lucas Waldin.

[edmontonsymphony.com](http://edmontonsymphony.com)

## MONTREAL

### Montreal Symphony Orchestra

#### Chamber Music: Quebec and France (January 24)

While Montreal's other symphony orchestra spends this month celebrating the province's cosmopolitan population, the OSM focuses more finely on the links between Quebec and France with three works that tie together similarities between the two landscapes. Musicians from the orchestra, including violinists Ramsey Husser and Johannes Janssonius, violinist Natalie Racine, cellist Gary Russell and pianist Louise-Andrée Baril, plus baritone Stephen Hegedus and narrator James Hyndman, concoct a programme that features a new work, *Création mondiale*, by Régis Campo, a student of Grisey's. The verse of French-Canadian poets Émile Nelligan and Hector de Saint-Denis Garneau serve as literary inspiration for this world premiere performance. Another piece, also Nelligan-based, is Claremont Pépin's Suite No 1 for Violin, Cello and Piano. Finishing with a flourish, the musicians launch into Fauré's Piano Quartet No 1 in C minor.

[osm.ca](http://osm.ca)

## SAN FRANCISCO

### San Francisco Symphony

#### Pinchas Zukerman (January 25-29)

The baseball season is a long way off, but Pinchas Zukerman scores a triple play in the Golden City. While also conducting Mozart's wonderfully popular Symphony No 40, Zukerman manages also to serve as violin soloist in the composer's Adagio in E major (a replacement movement the composer had written for his fifth violin concerto for 18th-century soloist Antonio Brunetti), his fleet and sweet Rondo in C (another Brunetti commission) and the sprightly Violin Concerto No 3. To finish and grounding the forward-thinking Mozart in the 20th century, Zukerman takes on the viola solo in Paul Hindemith's *Trauermusik*, composed at short-notice to mark the death of England's King George V.

[sfsymphony.org](http://sfsymphony.org)

## MONTREAL

### Metropolitan Orchestra

#### Brotherhood in Cosmopolitan Montreal (January 26)

When the January 2010 earthquake struck Haiti, it hit Montréal's population of 100,000 Haitians (the largest in Canada) very hard. Almost exactly two years later, the city's second symphony orchestra pays its respects to its multicultural make-up with a global and spiritual programme. Russian-born conductor Airat Ichmouratov leads the orchestra, featuring Chinese erhu virtuoso Lan Tung, Canadian soprano and new-music champion Janice Jackson, Parisian pianist Patrice Laré and Quebecois Ensemble Kleztory. They kick off with Vancouverite Mark Armanini's *Heartland*





Ben Heppner  
reprises his Ahab  
for Calgary Opera

*pour erhu et orchestre*, compatriot Jérôme Blais's Yiddish folk song *Dremlen Feygl Oyf Di Tsvaygn*, Haitian composer Carmen Brouard's voodoo-inspired *Oeuvre sur Baron Lacroix* and Ichmouratov's own world premiere 'on the theme of cosmopolitan Montreal', before wrapping up with traditional klezmer music.  
[orchestremetropolitain.com](http://orchestremetropolitain.com)

## NEW YORK

### New York Philharmonic

Alan Gilbert Conducts Beethoven, Stravinsky and Ravel (January 26-28)

While the New York Philharmonic devotes much of March to exploring The Modern Beethoven (previous years' festivals under music director Alan Gilbert concentrated on Hungarian composers and Stravinsky), they get a head start with artist in residence Frank Peter Zimmermann. The German violinist performs Beethoven's Violin Concerto, juxtaposing the work against two 20th-century masterpieces that account for the modern component. Stravinsky delves into neo-classicism in his Symphony in Three Movements, which Gilbert pairs with Ravel's lushly shaded *Daphnis et Chloé* Suite No 2. It's an intelligent trio of works that is bound to draw a few uncommon connections between the composers, and one that is characteristic of the insightfulness Gilbert is bringing to his still-young tenure at the Phil.  
[nyphil.org](http://nyphil.org)

## MADISON

### Madison Opera

Galileo Galilei (January 26-29)

The mathematical exactitude and scientific sensibilities that dominate Philip Glass's music (the composer began his obsession with Einstein during his childhood) coalesce in his opera on the biography of Galileo with a libretto by director and playwright Mary Zimmermann. Opening with the scientist's death, Glass works Pinter-like from end to beginning, weaving in themes of science, religion and family. The role of Galileo is shared by tenor William Joyner (elder) and baritone John Arnold (younger), while soprano Jamie-Rose Guarrine plays his daughter Maria Celeste. A Scott Parry, who helmed an imaginative absurdist opera, *The Pig, the farmer, and the artist* off-Broadway last year, directs while Kelly Kuo conducts the Madison Symphony Orchestra.  
[madisonopera.org](http://madisonopera.org)



PHOTOGRAPHY: CHRIS CHRISTODOULOU

## CHICAGO

Chicago Symphony Orchestra  
Muti Conducts Carmina Burana  
(January 26-31)

The bold dominance that conductor Riccardo Muti imposes on Carl Orff's sound and fury has made his recording of *Carmina Burana* for EMI one of the top picks for any classical CD collection. Here, Muti brings his interpretation to his new home in Chicago with a starry cast of soloists: dynamic and dynamite soprano Maria Grazia Schiavo, who rose to international acclaim under Muti's baton in 2010 with a performance of Mozart's *La Betulia liberata*, breezes through the Windy City, along with eloquent countertenor Max Emanuel Cencic and tantalising baritone Stéphane Degout. Supplying the essential choral oomph are the Chicago Symphony Chorus and Chicago Children's Choir. As a prelude to the festivities, Muti also leads his players in Schubert's Symphony No 3 and the world premiere of Smirnov's *Space Odyssey*.  
[cso.org](http://cso.org)

## CALGARY

### Calgary Opera

Moby Dick (January 28 – February 3)

As insiders can attest, getting a new opera on its feet for the inaugural performance pales in comparison to giving it a second run. Bucking this trend is composer Jake Heggie, whose *Dead Man Walking* has received countless productions across the United States, Australia, Canada, Germany, Austria and Sweden in just over 10 years. If that wasn't enough evidence that Heggie may well come to be known as one of America's greatest operatic composers, his 2010 work *Moby Dick* sails its course

among co-producing companies: Following the world premiere in Dallas and Australian debut in Adelaide, it heads to Canada where it retains the original Ahab, Ben Heppner, as the captain of the *Pequod*. Gut-wrenching, immersively detailed and with a production by Leonard Foglia that embraces 'high tech' without forsaking high culture, this *Moby Dick* also boasts Brett Polegato as Starbuck, Colin Ainsworth as Ishmael and Justin Welsh as Queequeg. Kentucky Opera music director and principal conductor Joseph Mechavich conducts.  
[calgaryopera.com](http://calgaryopera.com)

## ST PAUL

### Minnesota Opera

Werther (January 28 – February 5)

Teeming with tortured artistry and romantic fire, Massenet's Goethean opera gets a pair of hot-blooded leads to warm up the Great Lakes area. Doe-eyed Romanian mezzo-soprano Roxana Constantinescu brings her velvety, supple voice and expressive French tone to the role of Charlotte, the object of Werther's obsession. A tenor who held his own with Angela Gheorghiu and Thomas Hampson in the Met's last run of Zeffirelli's *La traviata*, the fast-rising James Valenti stars as the ardently unbalanced Werther (A J Glueckert sings the role on February 4). Austrian conductor Christoph Campestrini conducts the production, directed by Kevin Newbury, whose staging of Bernstein's *Mass* with Marin Alsop garnered a Grammy nomination — not to mention a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice plaudit.  
[mnopera.org](http://mnopera.org)

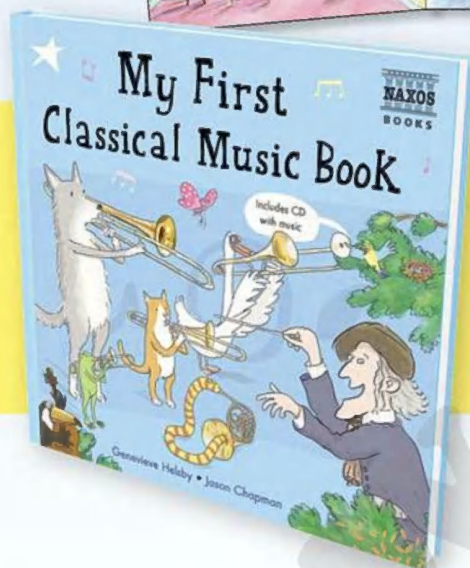
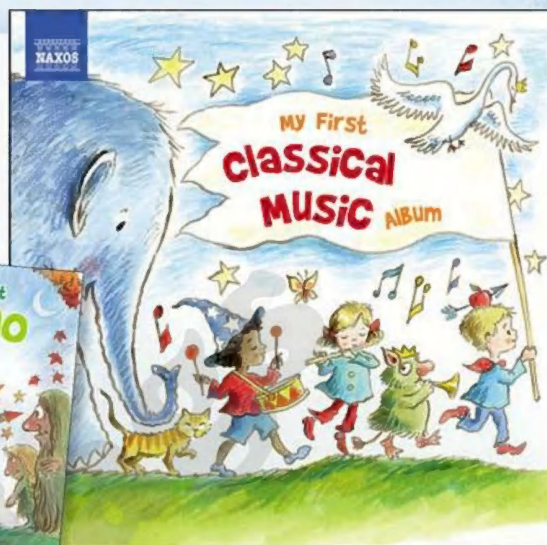
Previews by Olivia Giovetti





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# Reviews



## Ken Smith reviews Sidney Corbett's *Absconditus*:

'The main problem is one of dynamics – the artists' breathing, in fact, is sometimes louder than the playing' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE XI**



## Jed Distler reviews Haydn from Anton Kuerti:

'Kuerti animates the great final sonata with tiny yet noticeable inflections of pulse' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE XI**

## Beethoven • Brahms • Bruch

**Beethoven** Trio for Piano, Clarinet and Cello Op 11

**Brahms** Trio for Piano, Clarinet and Cello Op 114

**Bruch** Eight Pieces for Piano, Clarinet and

Cello – Nos 1-3; No 6

**Ensemble Liaison**

Tall Poppies © TP217 (65' • DDD)



**Debut recording for five-year-old Australian ensemble**

The jacket cover on Ensemble Liaison's new recording shows the musicians floating on air. They have a similarly elevating effect on the trios for clarinet, cello and piano by Beethoven, Brahms and Bruch that constitute the disc's repertoire.

Beethoven's Trio in B-flat major, Op 11, begins at a frisky clip, its first-movement marking of *Allegro con brio* given full, fleet consideration. Clarinetist David Griffiths, cellist Svetlana Bogosavljevic and pianist Timothy Young emphasise the score's Classicism, shaping the score with trim and tender assurance. The *Adagio*'s lyricism enjoys nuanced definition, and the ensemble manages to be both giddy and elegant in the finale's buoyant variations.

As they do in the Beethoven, Griffiths and Bogosavljevic keep vibrato in check in Brahms' Trio in A minor, Op 114, while applying ample warmth to the poetic writing. With Young maintaining sure balances, the performers sensitively limn the composer's distinctive blend of Classical and Romantic elements. Their generous fire and propulsion in the last movement stand in contrast to the autumnal beauty and charm of the central movements.

Ensemble Liaison's artistry is so attuned to animated and songful gestures that a listener may regret that only four of Bruch's Eight Pieces for Clarinet, Cello and Piano, Op 83, are offered here. Even so, the musicians are supremely refined – and controlled: listen to Griffiths' exceptional command of soft dynamics – as they revel in the wistful, rapturous and proud writing.



Floating on music: Ensemble Liaison play Beethoven, Brahms and Bruch

So, would it be too much to ask that they perform the other half of the collection on their next disc?

**Donald Rosenberg**

## Beethoven • Mendelssohn

**Beethoven** String Quartet No 16, Op 135

**Mendelssohn** String Quartet No 6, Op 80

**Jupiter Quartet**

Marquis © MARQUIS81405 (52' • DDD)



**Banff competition winners  
in composers' final quartets**

In pairing the final string quartets – and, almost, the final creations – of Mendelssohn and Beethoven, the Jupiter Quartet sheds illuminating and eloquent light on composers whose immortal music only occasionally reflects their more mortal circumstances. Liz Freivogel, the Jupiters' viola player, touches upon this reality in her compelling programme-note, saying the group was 'struck by the extreme contrast in emotional worlds presented in the two works'. In other words, the

generally content Mendelssohn wrote his moody Quartet in F minor soon after the death of his sister, Fanny, while the famously brooding Beethoven's Quartet in F major, Op 135, is sunny and playful for the most part.

Whatever the psychological provenance of these pieces, the Jupiters play both with great intensity of feeling. The musicians lavish suppleness and flexibility on the Mendelssohn, phrasing as one – you can actually hear them breathe together at many points – and interacting as if immersed in a series of dark, aching conversations.

The Beethoven also benefits from the Jupiters' expressive elasticity, as well as the clarity with which every line is declaimed and connected to what surrounds it. In the sublime third movement, the players take Beethoven's marking (*Lento assai, cantante e tranquillo*) at its word, allowing phrases to unfold in all their hushed splendour.

When the 'It must be!' figure in the finale arrives, the explosion nearly comes across as a celebration of the 'extreme contrasts' that Freivogel mentions. Perhaps it is no wonder

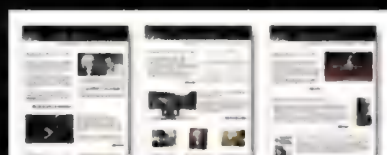


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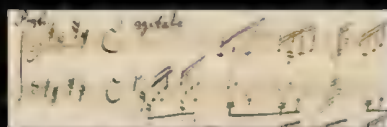
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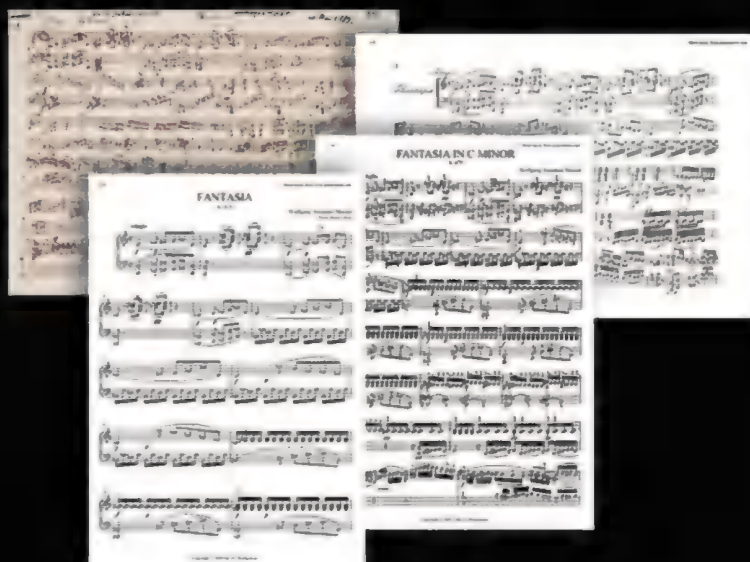
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that a group called the Jupiter Quartet would raise both these works to the heavens.

**Donald Rosenberg**

## Corbett

*Absconditus*<sup>a</sup>. *Detroit Chroicles*<sup>b</sup>. *Schneetod*<sup>c</sup>.  
*Nova Angeletta*<sup>d</sup>. *Archeipel Chagall I*

**Sarah Plum** *vn* with <sup>cd</sup>**Patricia Green** *mez*

<sup>a</sup>**Jonathan Ruck** *vc* <sup>bc</sup>**Timothy Lovelace** *pf*

Blue Griffin © BGR235 (72' • DDD)



### Plum and friends explore Chicago-born Corbett

Given the utter transparency of Sidney Corbett's music, it's never clear what could possibly be hidden in *Absconditus* (2011), the title-piece that translates literally as 'concealed'. Odds are, though, that it's relatively similar to what's going on beneath the surface of *Detroit Chronicles* (1996), the earliest music here and a piece so obviously born of the same creative voice that it's hard to believe the two works were written 16 years apart.

Corbett's music has been described as 'ascetic, yet sensual', which captures perfectly its underlying dualities and contradictions. Rhythmically complex yet slow, his pieces unfold in expansive lines that are essentially tonal while still shunning conventional relationships between pitches. Corbett paints a Ligeti-like wealth of colour, despite keeping the musical timbre mostly to conventional instrumental sounds. Rarely, in fact, is so much made from such limitations.

Despite those restraints, violinist Sarah Plum and a range of guest musicians perform these pieces with a surprising range of sounds. Particularly notable is mezzo-soprano Patricia Green's marked contrast between *Schneetod* (to a poem by Andrej Murasov) with violin and piano, and *Nova Angeletta* (based on a text by Petrarch) accompanied by violin alone.

Little on this recording could be classified as easy listening, yet it becomes easier the more you let the music dictate its own terms. The main problem is one of dynamics; the artists' breathing, in fact, is sometimes louder than the playing. How many times can you get up to change the volume and still be listening to the music as the composer intended? **Ken Smith**

## Hanson

Symphony No 1, 'Nordic'<sup>a</sup>. The Lament for Beowulf<sup>b</sup>

Seattle<sup>b</sup> *Chorale and Symphony Orchestra /*  
**Gerard Schwarz**

Naxos American Classics © 8.559700 (49' • DDD • T)

Recorded <sup>a</sup>1988, <sup>b</sup>1990

From Delos <sup>a</sup>DE3073 (3/90), <sup>b</sup>DE3105 (7/92)



### Naxos reissues Schwarz's Delos Hanson recordings

It isn't surprising that 1920s American composers with a tonal bent would align themselves with Sibelius, but Howard Hanson (of Scandinavian descent himself) revelled in that association to the point of dubbing his Symphony No 1 from 1922 the *Nordic*. Hanson's comparatively old-school approach, which shuns both the tonal expansions of Schoenberg and the rhythmic adventurousness of Stravinsky, also generally lacks the full melodic verve of Sibelius. His works succeed best in creating a self-sustaining range of emotional states in sound.

Conductor Gerard Schwarz, who has made a career of bringing Hanson and similarly minded composers back to public attention (these recordings were originally made by Delos in the 1988 and 1990), offers comparably more drama, taking greater liberties with the musical line than Hanson's own recordings for Mercury. And yet Schwarz's readings are ultimately more mercurial, by turns breezily lyrical and sombrely brooding, evoking a certain American optimism beneath the music's Romantic veneer. Hanson's *Lament for Beowulf* (1925), despite its often ponderous text – 'For him then they feared, the folk of the Geats / A pile on the earth all unweaklike that was' hardly makes for a rousing opening – is a bit less 'American', with Schwarz restraining the stark musical contrasts without lessening the piece's epic scope.

My sole caveat with this disc is its length. Even with Naxos's pricing system, a stingy 49 minutes hardly compares either to the Mercury or original Delos releases, both of which paired the First and Second Symphonies at slightly more than 70 minutes.

**Ken Smith**

## Haydn

Keyboard Sonatas – HobXVI/6; HobXVI/23;  
HobXVI/42; HobXVI/44; HobXVI/48; HobXVI/52

**Anton Kuerti** *pf*

Analekta © AN2 9933 (78' • DDD)



### Austrian-Canadian Kuerti in animated Haydn sonatas

Anton Kuerti's Haydn is alive with intelligent nuance, stylish surety and tonal allure. The four-movement G major Sonata (HobXVI/6) that opens this robustly engineered disc delights the ears through the pianist's subtle contrapuntal repartee between the hands, which proves most telling at climactic points, along with a genuinely vocal attitude towards

shaping long melodic lines. His effortless yet sophisticated articulation of the *Allegro molto*'s rapid phrase groupings makes the bar-lines disappear to magical effect. In contrast to Emanuel Ax's crisp and clipped approach to the first movement of the G minor Sonata (HobXVI/44), Kuerti's denser textures and wider dynamic spectrum add urgency and emotional weight to the music. He plays up the wit of the outer movements of the F major Sonata (HobXVI/23) without exaggeration, even if the finale is not quite the scampering *Presto* others make it out to be.

Yet Kuerti's slight relaxation of the *Vivace assai* directive in the D major Sonata (HobXVI/42) allows for more cogent melodic shaping and clearer, more varied articulation of contrapuntal activity. Kuerti's astute timing and scaling of dynamics command undivided attention in the first movement of the sublime two movement C major Sonata (HobXVI/48); the eloquently sung-out final page is worthy of Horowitz's unforgettable live 1967 recording (Sony). Lastly, Kuerti animates the great final sonata (HobXVI/52) with tiny yet noticeable inflections of pulse that draw more attention to Haydn's expressive content than to the pianist's aplomb. One may find brasher, bouncier Haydn-playing on disc but Kuerti's seasoned expertise guarantees lasting satisfaction. **Jed Distler**

## Verdehr Trio

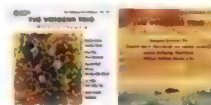
'The Making of a Medium, Vol 19 –  
American Images 4'

**S Freund** Triodances **L Holby** Rock Valley Trio  
**R Lorenz** Compass Points (Puntos en la brújula)  
**K Puts** Three Nocturnes **AR Thomas** Dancing  
Helix Rituals  
**Verdehr Trio**  
Crystal © CD949 (60' • DDD)

## Verdehr Trio

'The Making of a Medium, Vol 20 –  
American Images 5'

**M Brouwer** Trio *Sierra* Recordando una  
melodia olvidada **Wallace** Sonata a tre  
**Wolfgang** Sketch Book  
**Verdehr Trio**  
Crystal © CD970 (62' • DDD)



### More exploration in Vols 19 and 20 of the Verdehr Trio's epic series

Still going strong after 40 years, thanks to their extraordinarily long-lived residence at Michigan State University, the Verdehr Trio continue to breathe new life into the once humble clarinet trio. They have commissioned more than 200 new works



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Consistent commissioners: the Verdehr Trio

from a wide range of composers; each is a substantial, often highly enjoyable piece of music with a conservative bent – there's nothing here for players wearing bunny suits. Kevin Puts's *Three Nocturnes* are fragrant with Rachmaninov and Chopin but reside firmly in a spaced-out romanticism of the composer's own making, rich in long melodic lines, mining in particular the clarinet's timbre. It's a crossover hit waiting to happen.

Roberto Sierra's one-movement *Recordando una melodía olvidada* winds without pause through a narrative of moods and styles recalling film noir romances like *Portrait of Jennie*. Los Angeles-based Gernot Wolfgang, in a vocabulary stretching from Gershwin to Bogart, provides a nice refresher after Sierra's heady intimacy. Lee Hoiby gave his carelessly tuneful *Rock Valley Trio* the informal alternative title *You Verdehr and suddenly my heart stopped beating*. After Hoiby 'snipped out' the main melody as an encore piece for other solo instruments, it was performed by bassist Allan von Schenkel, who had first introduced Hoiby to the Verdehrs.

The music can be industrious at times but that doesn't mean it can't be diverting, as in Stephen Freund's giggly *Triodances* and Augusta Read Thomas's boogie-woogie-ish *Dancing Helix Rituals*.

Vol 20 concludes with William Wallace's nostalgic score for life rooted somewhere in the previous century, before the wars. It was commissioned by the Salt Lake Chamber Music from the septuagenarian composer, now living in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. The music is vast stretches of sheer beauty which, according to the engaging booklet-notes, have all sorts of personal associations.

As always with the Verdehr Trio, the playing is of a high order. Walter Verdehr and Else Ludewig-Verdehr can flash a virtuoso flair if needed, and Silvia Roederer's

wonderful tone has deepened. As always with Crystal, the simply printed liners contain each composer's programme-notes. The recordings, made by Blue Griffin's Sergei Kvitko, are rich and clear. **Laurence Vittes**

### 'Paysages'

**Debussy** *Ariettes oubliées* **Fauré** *Les roses d'Ispahan. Nell. Après un rêve. Adieu* **Messiaen** *Poèmes pour Mi*

**Susanna Phillips** *sop* **Myra Huang** *pf*  
Bridge © BRIDGE9356 (54' • DDD • T/t)



**Francophile debut disc for Alabaman soprano**

This ambitious programme – so simple on paper, so difficult to perform – traces the lineage of French *chanson* from the restrained Romanticism of Fauré, with one foot still in the salon, to the mystical modernism of Messiaen, who barely had one foot remaining on earth. By opening their gambit with Debussy's *Ariettes oubliées*, however, soprano Susanna Phillips (in her first solo recording) and pianist Myra Huang initially tilt in favour of the piano, with Huang proving well equipped for the music's stylistic demands.

If Phillips lets Huang edge ahead in the Debussy, she more than compensates in Messiaen's *Poèmes pour Mi* (1936), an early song-cycle dedicated to the composer's first wife. Whereas Debussy was concerned primarily with expanding his harmonic palette, Messiaen shifted his entire cultural palette, fitting those now-expanded harmonies to ancient Greek rhythms and Hindu structures. On a purely technical level, the music requires from a vocalist almost pianistic precision in both pitch and rhythm, which Phillips provides with seeming ease.

The Messiaen, though heard slightly more often in its orchestral version, is still enough

of a rarity to make it the recording's chief draw. By prefacing the *Poèmes* with Debussy, Messiaen's occasionally spiky dissonances come across as an inevitable musical summit, soon followed by a pleasant descent through Fauré's more conventional sense of vocal colour. Rarely, though, do the final four songs seem like filler; rather, they bring a musically rich, emotionally rewarding pay-off to a fine recording debut. **Ken Smith**

### 'Violin for One'

**JS Bach** *Partita No 2, BWV1004 - Chaconne*  
**Milstein** *Paganiniana* **Prokofiev** *Sonata for Two Violins, Op 56* **Schnittke** *A Paganini* **Ysaÿe** *Sonata No 3, Op 27 No 3*  
**Stanislav Pronin** *vn*  
Sono Luminus © DSL92139 (57' • DDD)



**Solo recital from fiddler with direct link to Oistrakh**

Despite the big names on the marquee and an unusual over-dubbing feat, the centrepiece of Stanislav Pronin's debut recital is Alfred Schnittke's huge *A Paganini*. It was written during a period of intense pain, two years after the composer was banned from travelling outside the Soviet Union. It illustrates indirectly how the authorities were killing its creator artistically by imprisoning the violin in the same kind of dark places: cold, angry and without beauty. As Paganini often did during the dark periods of his life, Schnittke responded with an outcry of artistic agony which Pronin's performance, by taking Schnittke's technical challenges to their limit, captures in terrible detail.

Pronin stares equally unafraid down the gun of Bach's D minor Chaconne. This is Bach beyond original-instrument rules. This is Bach as the composer knew it, trying out the various parts of the titanic movement until it was all done. He begins as if each note and breath in between were painful. It's an intriguing recital: Pronin puts Milstein's famous *tour de force* through its paces and finds dark corners in the sumptuous beauties of Ysaÿe. Pronin even scores by playing both parts in the Prokofiev; the out-of-body experience arouses the music's emotional content in an attractively unsettling way.

John Newton's sound, recorded at Ducloux Hall in Austin (Pronin has been an artist-in-residence at the University of Texas), is intense, close-up but with good acoustic space. In his booklet notes Pronin attaches 'extramusical imagery' to the piece, and writes of 'dancing snowflake patterns, shiny and brilliant yet quite delicate'. It's a window on Prokofiev's Russian soul, and Pronin's own.

**Laurence Vittes**



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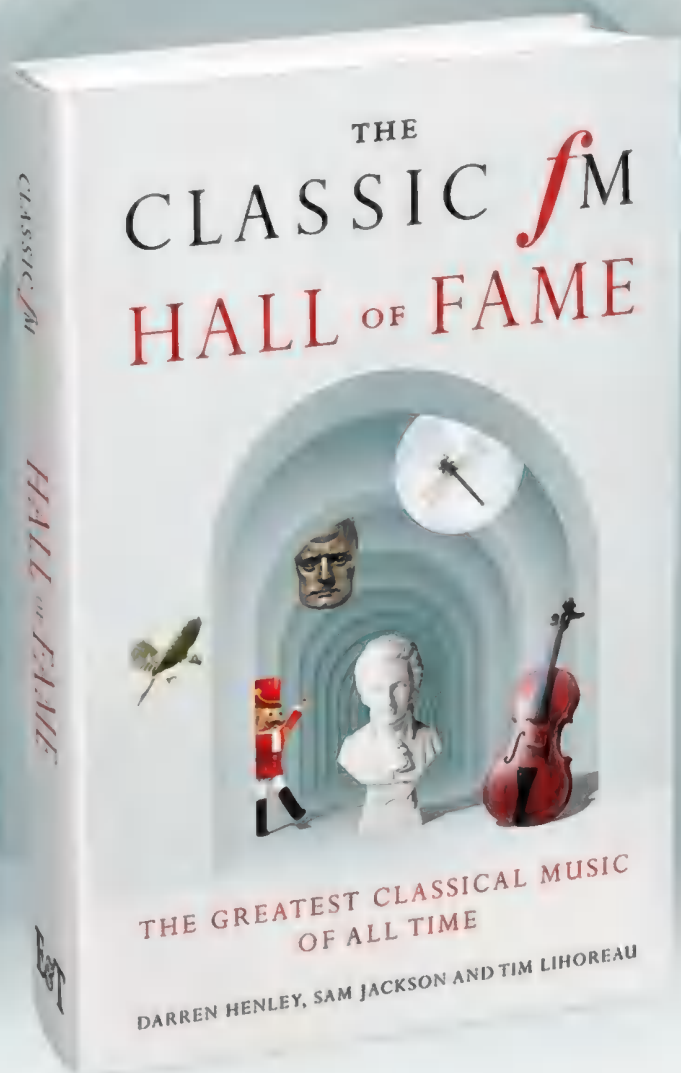
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## THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



As an architecture critic, **PHILIP KENNICOTT** spends a lot of time looking at building types that don't improve over time. The concert hall, which he surveys for this month's *Gramophone*, is a happy exception to this tale of decline. 'We may be in a golden age of new concert halls,' he says, 'and how often do you hear a critic say something like that?'



**DAVID PATRICK STEARNS** is a critic for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, author of the *artsjournal.com* blog 'Condemned to Music' and a contributor to *The Guardian* and *Opera News*. He came away from his *Gramophone* Collection survey of Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* speaking only in French Symbolist aphorisms, even when discussing the weather.



**PETER DICKINSON** has admired Lennox Berkeley's music for over 50 years and has presented it in concerts, broadcasts and books – a new one coming out next year. Revisiting Berkeley's work in the 1940s for this month's Specialist's Guide confirmed it was a golden decade, not just for the composer but for British music in general.

# GRAMOPHONE

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## Celebrating today's most inspiring concert halls



*Gramophone* may be a magazine of recorded music but I hope you'll excuse and enjoy our celebration of concert halls in this issue. Aside from the fact that many, or most, collectors of classical music recordings will also be regular concert-goers, the auditorium is where orchestras develop a rapport with their music director, with each other and with audiences. It's also where an increasing proportion of today's new releases,

captured during live performances, originate. And as buildings, they can impress and inspire aesthetically and make a bold public statement about the role of music in society today – whether taking pride of place in a prestigious city-centre location or as the public beacon of an urban renewal project. Not all halls built in the past century were considered great successes but many of those from the past decade have been rightly acclaimed, capturing the imagination. In the best examples, architects, acousticians and musicians have thought hard about what a concert hall should look like, sound like, and how it should relate to the community around it. We celebrate 10 of the most inspiring and dramatic examples.

Most of us can recall, at some point in our lives, unexpectedly encountering a particular composer's music and finding it resonating with us profoundly. For Rob Cowan, as a 14-year-old, it was Bartók:

'Architects, acousticians and musicians have thought hard about what a concert hall should look like, sound like, and how it should relate to the community around it'

he was gripped, challenged, enthralled by the Hungarian master's dark and innovative music and it has continued to prove a lifelong journey, the milestones of which he shares with us in this month's cover story. Meanwhile, in *The Gramophone* Collection, David Patrick Stearns explores the recordings of Bartók's sole opera, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, completed a century ago, and recommends his favourites.

Finally, it is a joy to welcome you to *Gramophone* for the first time in my new role as editor, after a decade in various posts with the magazine. To hold such a position – proud as I am of both the title's great heritage and of its committed, expert writers today – is a great privilege. My thanks to my predecessor James Inverne; and as the months progress, I hope many of you will contact me with feedback and ideas.



Martin

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FOR THE FULL LIST OF  
GRAMOPHONE REVIEWERS  
TURN TO PAGE 39



January 2012

# GRAMOPHONE *Choice*

**G** Informed by our unrivalled panel of critics, we choose the month's must-hear recordings



## Recording of the Month

*'Liszt's songs demand operatic glamour. With her diamantine tone, dramatic flair and free-soaring top notes, Diana Damrau provides it in spades'*

### LISZT

Lieder

**Diana Damrau** *sop* **Helmut Deutsch** *pf*

Virgin Classics 070928-2

► **FOR THE REVIEW BY RICHARD WIGMORE, TURN TO PAGE 40**



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### BEETHOVEN

Complete works for piano and orchestra

**Orchestra of Opera North** / **Shelley** *pf*

Chandos CHAN10695

'This is a major new cycle, an important addition not only to the catalogue but also to Howard Shelley's exceptionally fine discography.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 43**



### FALLA

Noches en los jardines de España, etc

**Perianes** *pf* **BBC SO** / **Pons** Harmonia Mundi HMC90 2099

'This is a disc to lift the spirits. Whether the music is sultry, strenuous or sunny, Perianes plays with an infallible ear for style, atmosphere and colour.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 45**



### LISZT

Piano Concertos

**Barenboim** *pf* **Staatskapelle Berlin** / **Boulez**

DG 477 9521

'Time and again Barenboim shines a wholly personal light on music that has all too often encouraged a facile alternative to quality.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**



### GRIEG. LISZT

Piano Concertos

**Hough** *pf* **Bergen PO** / **Litton**

Hyperion CDA67824

'Introspective one minute, of the most refined bravura the next, Hough expresses a personality all his own, brilliantly alert to mercurial changes of mood.'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**



### DOHNANYI. PENDERECKI

Sextets

**Ensemble Kheops** Fuga Libera FUG585

'As for the Ensemble Kheops, no praise could be too high: unbelievably, they sound as if they were born to play both works ... Crystal-clear recorded sound'

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 54**



**DVOŘÁK**

Love Songs. Piano Quintet.  
Cypresses

**Kučerová sop Eschenbach**  
*pf Thymos Qt*  
Avie AV2234

'The real star is Eschenbach, whose accompaniments in the songs amount to added commentaries and who is the ideal playing partner in the Quintet.'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 55

**BACH**

Trio Sonatas

**Quinney org**  
Coro COR16095

'The technical challenges are immense, requiring independent control of four limbs (and at least two brains!). Needless to say, Quinney delivers finger- and foot-perfect performances.'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 60

**CHOPIN**

Etudes

**Pollini**

Testament SBT 1473

'What superb articulacy, what awe-inspiring assurance and uncanny technical perfection. All lovers of great piano-playing will need to add this to their collection.'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 62

**'MELANCOLIA'**

Spanish Songs and Arias

**Petibon sop Orquestra**  
**Nacional de España / Pons**  
DG 477 9447

'Throughout, Petibon's acting and character skills evidently lift each interpretation. The recording is superbly natural. Hugely recommended.'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 74

**DVD****MAHLER**

Symphony No 8

**Soloists; choirs;**

**Gewandhausorchester /**  
**Chailly**

Accentus ACC20222

'These renditions must go right to the top of the list on technical grounds, irrespective of sound carrier.'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 70

**Reissue****LISZT**

Piano works

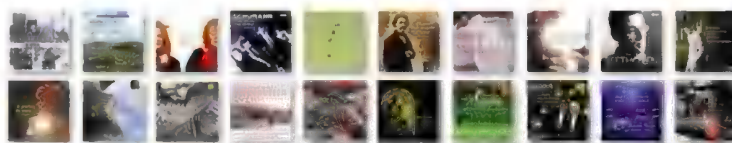
**Brendel**

**Regis RRC1378**

'This richly comprehensive reissue shows Brendel in his early years as a towering Lisztian proclaiming Liszt's genius at a time when there were still accusations of vulgarity.'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 64

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# Naxos Highlights

New Releases September to December · 2011



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"Antoni Wit excels ■■ Janáček interpreter... drawing stirring singing from the chorus."

*The Sunday Telegraph*

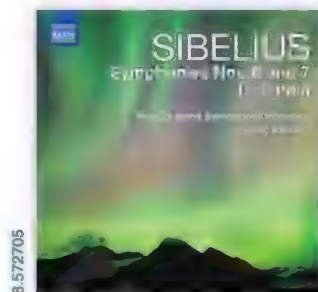


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## IRELAND Piano Concerto

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*The Daily Telegraph*



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## SIBELIUS Symphonies Nos. 5 & 7

"Arguably the best [Sibelius survey] to appear on disc since Osmo Vänskä's near definitive Lahti cycle."

*The Guardian*

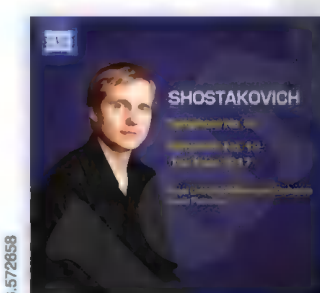


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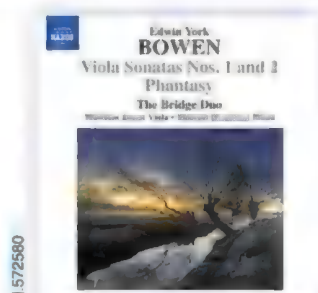


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## SHOSTAKOVICH Symphonies Nos. 6 & 12

"Petrenko and the Liverpoolians reach new heights of sonic beauty"

*BBC Music Magazine Orchestral Choice*



8.572580

## BOWEN Viola Sonatas Nos. 1 & 2

"With Michael Hampton the sensitive accompanist, Matthew Jones gives consistently fine performances, beautifully recorded."

*Gramophone* nn 8.572579: English Viola Music



8.572824-25

## SHOSTAKOVICH New Babylon

"Excellent direction from Mark Fitz-Gerald - a conductor we should hear more of on disc."

*Gramophone* on Shostakovich: The Girlfriends

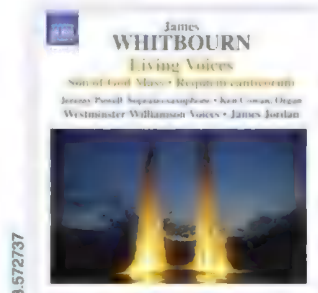


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*Classic FM Magazine*



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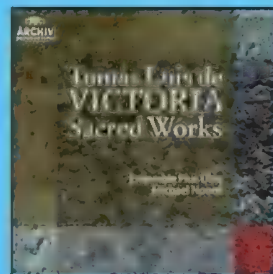
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The *Gramophone* Player allows you to explore the finest new releases of the month, through complete tracks from our *Gramophone* Choice albums, as well as excerpts from the recordings recommended in this issue's *Gramophone* Collection. You can also listen to the latest Podcast, in which we ask leading artists about their craft – this month we talk to the Polish conductor behind some of Naxos's most thrilling orchestral recordings, Antoni Wit.

## ONLINE FEATURES



Reviews editor Andrew Mellor reports from Lahti, where new principal conductor Okko Kamu has different views about Sibelius interpretation from those of his predecessor Osmo Vänskä. Both have new recorded cycles in the making, ripe for stylistic comparison.

## LISTENING WIRELESSLY



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## GRAMOPHONE HOMEPAGE

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**EDITOR'S CHOICE**  
*Gramophone* (UK)

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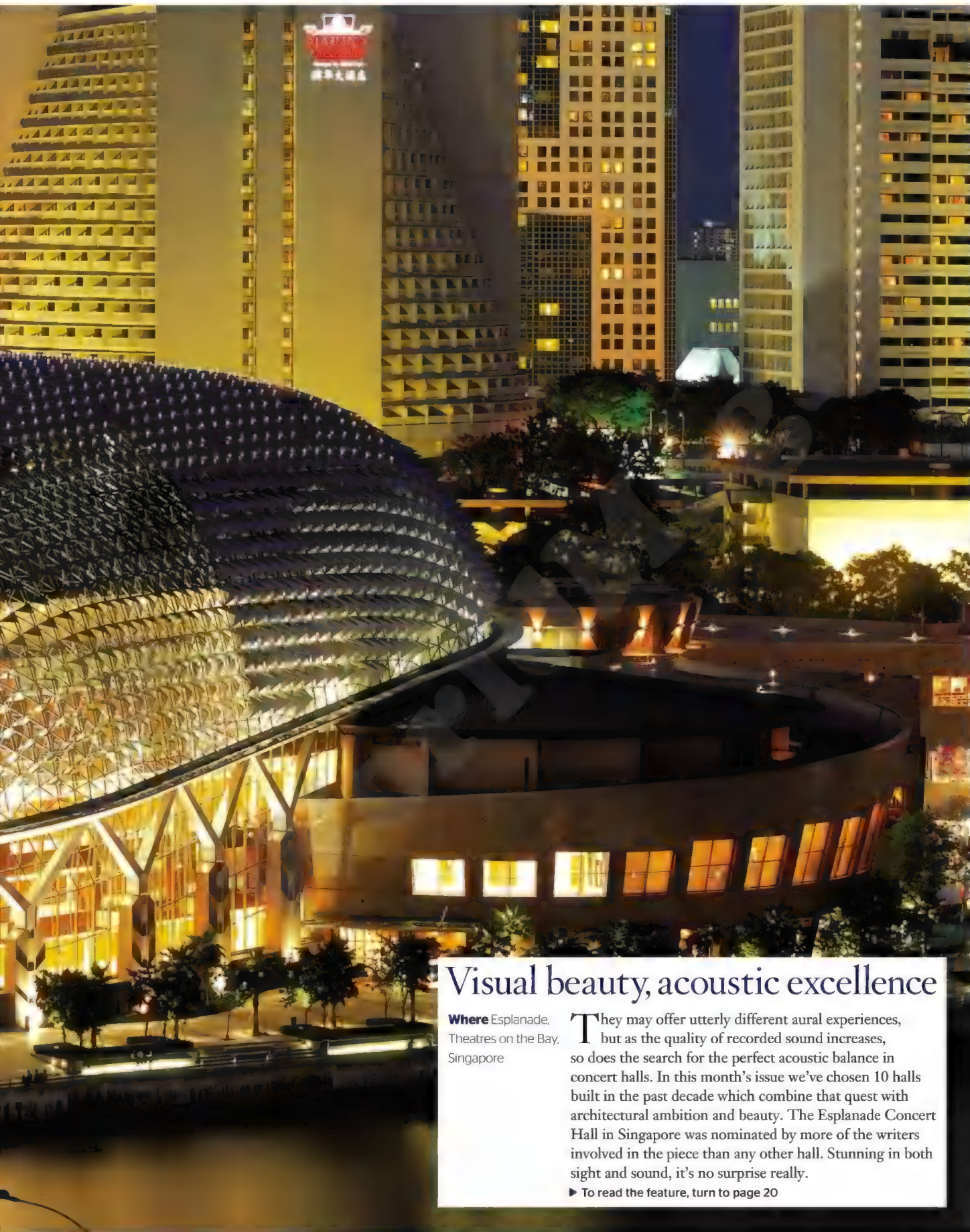


# PRELUDES

On music, on musicians, on record

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## Visual beauty, acoustic excellence

**Where** Esplanade,  
Theatres on the Bay,  
Singapore

**T**hey may offer utterly different aural experiences, but as the quality of recorded sound increases, so does the search for the perfect acoustic balance in concert halls. In this month's issue we've chosen 10 halls built in the past decade which combine that quest with architectural ambition and beauty. The Esplanade Concert Hall in Singapore was nominated by more of the writers involved in the piece than any other hall. Stunning in both sight and sound, it's no surprise really.

► To read the feature, turn to page 20

PHOTOGRAPHY: MORI HIDEAKA, COURTESY OF ESPLANADE - THEATRES ON THE BAY



# 'EMI is sold to Universal – there are now just three majors'

After years of speculation and near misses, Universal Music has acquired EMI's recorded music division, EMI Music, for £1.2 billion. The company was put on the market by Citigroup following an unhappy period under the ownership of Terra Firma. Universal Music, owned by the French corporation Vivendi, is the world's largest record company.

EMI Music comprises a large portfolio of labels including Angel, Astralwerks, Blue Note, Capitol, EMI Classics, EMI Records, Manhattan, Parlophone, Virgin Classics and Virgin Records. EMI was founded in March 1931 following the merger of the Columbia Gramophone Company and the Gramophone Company. From a

*'It remains to be seen how much of EMI's identity will be retained under the Universal umbrella'*

time, just 15 years ago, when there were five 'majors' (Universal, EMI, BMG, Sony and Warner), thanks to mergers and acquisitions the recorded music market is now dominated by just three – Universal, Sony and Warner, none of them British. The deal is still subject to regulatory approval, which could take at least six months, if not longer. But if it goes through it remains to be seen how much of EMI's individual identity will be retained under the Universal umbrella.

Needless to say, in all reports of the sale no mention has been made of EMI's extraordinary classical catalogue, nor of its current activities, but as most *Gramophone* readers will know, EMI's legacy is unrivalled and reads like a who's who of 20th-century interpretation. We await developments with interest.

In a separate, though not unrelated deal, EMI Music Publishing has been acquired by Sony/ATV (jointly owned by Sony and a consortium headed by the Michael Jackson Family Trust) for £1.4 billion. The catalogue contains some 1.3 million songs including many standards such as 'Over the rainbow', 'New York, New York' and 'Have yourself a merry little Christmas'.

A recent kerfuffle in Norway over that contentious issue of instruments on planes has ended in victory for the musical community – at least in the short term. Much-beleaguered orchestral musicians, already forced to defend their rights to take violins as hand luggage (when bulging suitcases fail to raise an eyebrow) and to pay for extra seats for cellos, were dealt an even greater blow by Scandinavia's second largest airline, Norwegian Air Shuttle, when the company imposed a ban on cellos in its cabins entirely.

Despite blaming 'security risks', the airline quickly reversed its position, thanks to the efforts of cellist Truls Mørk, who threatened to quit Norway over the issue. But already there are concerns that the embargo could be reinstated, as the company has asked Norway's aviation authority to conduct a risk assessment.

The implications for the wider musical community are worrying, should a precedent be set. Booking cellos into seats as passengers is common practice, as placing an expensive instrument in the unpressurised hold is highly risky. Nor should cellists be forced to hire an instrument when travelling – musicians develop idiosyncratic relationships with their instruments and this is key to producing a distinctive sound. Today's classical community is truly international. Audiences have an appetite for foreign players and musicians savour fresh collaborations bridging cultures and continents. A curtailment of travel would inevitably impact upon variety and innovation. **G**



## Specialist Classical Chart The UK's best-selling pure classical releases

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>1</b> (New) <b>Paul Mealer - 'A Tender Light'</b><br>Tenebrae; RPO / Nigel Short <i>Sony</i>  | <b>6</b> (6) <b>Miloš - 'The Guitar'</b><br>Miloš Karadaglić <i>DG</i>                             |
| <b>2</b> (2) <b>Liszt - 'My Piano Hero'</b><br>Lang Lang <i>Sony</i>                             | <b>7</b> (1) <b>'Homage to Maria Callas'</b><br>Angela Gheorghiu <i>EMI</i>                        |
| <b>3</b> (7) <b>'Songs of War'</b><br>Simon Keenlyside; Malcolm Martineau <i>Sony</i>            | <b>8</b> (8) <b>Schubert - Piano Sonatas, D840, 850 &amp; 894</b> Paul Lewis <i>Harmonia Mundi</i> |
| <b>4</b> (4) <b>Beethoven - The Symphonies</b><br>Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch / Chailly <i>Decca</i> | <b>9</b> (5) <b>'The Maltese Tenor'</b><br>Joseph Calleja <i>Decca</i>                             |
| <b>5</b> (3) <b>'Italia'</b><br>Nicola Benedetti; SCO / Curnyn <i>Decca</i>                      | <b>10</b> (New) <b>Mozart - Piano Concertos Nos 19 &amp; 23</b> Hélène Grimaud <i>Decca</i>        |



Paul Mealer's 'A Tender Light' goes straight to the top of the chart

Chart for week ending Nov 19 (previous week's position in brackets). Visit [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk) for weekly updates of the chart, along with reviews

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## MUSICIAN'S DIARY

# John Rutter

Chorister competitions, parliamentary committees and legal dinners – but what should a composer wear?

Composing is my deepest compulsion and my livelihood but an awfully solitary pursuit, which is why I especially cherish the more sociable aspects of my musical life. Lately these have been to the fore, though they sometimes involve putting on a suit, not generally a composer's attire. The month began with an invitation to appear before the All-Party Parliamentary Classical Music Group – definitely a suit-wearing occasion. The committee wants to know how it can help the music industry in all its aspects, and I was heartened to receive a courteous and attentive hearing from busy parliamentarians who lay party politics aside and seek out wrongs they can right.

**No suit needed** for my Come and Sing days. Many of my Saturdays are spent leading these around the country for any group of choral enthusiasts or organisation kind enough to invite me. The formula is simple: anyone is welcome, there is no concert to worry about, and we

*'We pick our winners, but I go home reflecting that the real hero is our unique cathedral choir tradition'*

sing through a wide range of music, just for pleasure but with vocal tips along the way. I love the glow that choral singing generates and I enjoyed two 'days' this month, in a school hall in Colchester raising funds for a brain-injuries charity and in the awe-inspiring historic setting of Middle Temple Hall in London. I am an honorary Benchler of the Middle Temple (as is Alfred Brendel) and at Bench dinners – suits again, with gowns – I have been delighted to discover that some of our finest legal minds are just as eager to hear about the world of music as I am to hear about the law, which fascinates me. The Temple supports an active music foundation and maintains the justly renowned Temple Church Choir, which I love to go and hear when I am in London.

**I'm not competitive** by nature but I have just chaired the judging panel for the BBC Radio 2 Young Chorister of the Year Final (I still haven't worked out what 'smart casual' means, so it's that suit again). Hundreds of church and cathedral choristers have been narrowed down to four girls and four boys, and the excitement is palpable in St Martin-in-the-Fields as they confidently sing like the seasoned pros they are. We pick our winners, but I go home reflecting that the real hero of the hour is our unique cathedral choir tradition, which we don't celebrate enough. I have an idea for a 'visit your cathedral' initiative aimed at those who have never done so, and if the C of E and the BBC would support it, a national treasure would be revealed to many.

**On the way to St Martin's** I stop off in the Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery and lose myself in wonder at the medieval and Renaissance art housed there. I have to choose some paintings



*With the talented finalists of Young Chorister of the Year*



*Generating a glow at the Come and Sing day in Colchester*



*Back home, and back to work marking up orchestral parts*



*Recording session, with Oliver Gooch and Tarik O'Regan*

with a Nativity theme for a Christmas TV programme with my choir, the Cambridge Singers, and there is an embarrassment of riches. In the end I let the BBC team decide.

**My sideline as recording** producer has brought me into contact with a new generation of musicians – Nick Collon's Aurora Orchestra, the choir of Clare College, Cambridge (which I directed in the 1970s) and its present director Graham Ross, together with composers such as Nico Muhly and Tarik O'Regan. I am in the midst of producing the live recording of Tarik's new opera *Heart of Darkness*, playing at the Linbury Studio in the Royal Opera House. Tarik and his librettist Tom Phillips have successfully set Joseph Conrad's dark novella, Opera East's production is gripping, cast and orchestra under Ollie Gooch are terrific, and (important for me) audience noises are few.

**So, home again** to the lonely desk where I'm marking up mounds of orchestral parts for a Carnegie Hall concert I'm conducting with the Korean soprano Sun Young Seo, who recently won the vocal award in the Tchaikovsky Competition. Tatyana's Letter Scene, here I come. **6**


► For Gramophone's review of John Rutter's 'The Colours of Christmas' on Decca, turn to page 72



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ONE TO WATCH

# 'Like a shot in the arm'

Violinist and conductor *Thomas Kemp* flies the flag for contemporary composers

**T**homas Kemp is a musician for the modern age. Committed to promoting 20th and 21st century works, he began his musical life as a violinist and chamber player at St Catherine's College, Cambridge, and the Royal Northern College of Music. Since then the 40-year-old has moved increasingly into the world of conducting, demonstrating a malleability in keeping with the agile contemporary music scene. His dedication to new music has earned him the respect of numerous high-profile composers and he has worked closely on premieres with Arvo Pärt, Thomas Adès, Julian Anderson, Brian Ferneyhough, Judith Bingham, Judith Weir and Brian Elias.

Kemp's first conducting role on disc was as music director of Chamber Domaine in world premiere works by Henrik Gorecki for Landor Records. Currently he is working with the ensemble on a series of contemporary recordings for Resonus Classics, the most recent by Mark-Anthony Turnage. Kemp also worked with Turnage at his inaugural Music@Malling festival last year, when he programmed the composer's music.

That Kemp is artistic director of a trailblazing festival and chamber ensemble has not gone unnoticed by his musical peers, and groups including the Swedish and Scottish Chamber Orchestras have invited him to conduct events. Next season he will also make his operatic debut in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* at Opera Holland Park. Still an active violinist, he makes regular appearances at various summer festivals, Wigmore Hall, Southbank Centre and Carnegie Hall, New York.

And there is barely pause to draw breath, as Kemp and Chamber Domaine are set to record Turnage's *Greek Suite* and Mahler's Fourth Symphony in 2012. **G**

► 'A Constant Obsession', Chamber Domaine's disc of world premiere Turnage recordings, is out on January 2, 2012



## The mentor *Judith Bingham*

I first met Thomas Kemp when I was commissioned to compose a piece for Chamber Domaine. The thing that strikes you is his energy. He is an incredibly dynamic person

– like a shot in the arm. It's wonderful to meet someone so committed and active at such a difficult time for the arts. He doesn't stick to the old formulas and he's always interested in new things. Because he is a violinist and ensemble musician, he is not an imperious conductor. He understands the instrumentalist's perspective.







## SESSION REPORT RLPO / Petrenko

Work: *Rachmaninov: Symphony No 3 in A minor, Op 44, and other works*

Artists: *Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra* Conductor: *Vasily Petrenko*

Date: *July 7-8, 2010; September 23, 2009 (Vocalise)* Venue: *Liverpool Philharmonic Hall*

Engineer: *David Pigott* Producer: *John Fraser; Andrew Cornall (Vocalise)*

Session Time: *Various (July 7 & 8); 1.30pm-4pm (Sep 23)* Words: *Amanda Holloway*

The orchestra starts packing up for the day, and Vasily Petrenko joins the producer John Fraser in a control room off the concert platform to discuss plans for tomorrow's session.

Two movements of Rachmaninov's Third Symphony are safely in the bag, and with just the last movement to capture, the atmosphere is relaxed and jokey. Fraser, EMI's legendary chief producer, and the 35-year-old conductor from St Petersburg make a good team.

'It's always a pleasure working with Vasily because he's so in control,' says Fraser. 'He comes in knowing what he wants things to sound like, but he's also ready to change course once he hears it over playback; for example, if he thinks that this particular corner needs a bit more room, or it's getting too slow at that point, he'll come into the control room, we'll discuss it, and off we'll go. It really is a wonderfully collaborative experience.'

Outside, spotlights accentuate the stark, uncompromising shape of Liverpool's 72-year old Philharmonic Hall. Inside, the fan-shaped Art Deco auditorium has a warm, bright acoustic. 'It's very much of its period, but in terms of listening, it's terrific,' says Fraser. 'It adds a lush bloom to the strings which is particularly suitable for Rachmaninov.'

Petrenko has been making full use of the hall as a recording venue since he became principal then chief conductor of the RLPO. Since 2009 the orchestra has recorded at least a dozen CDs with him, including an ongoing Shostakovich cycle on the Naxos label. The

*'It seems that Vasily can do no wrong, critically; and the orchestra works hard to be the best it can be'*  
— John Fraser, producer

Rachmaninov is the first for EMI, and Petrenko is confident that there will be more to follow (Symphony No 2 is already scheduled). He says proudly, 'The RLPO is in such a great shape now that it would be a shame to lose the momentum.'

Fraser concurs. 'It seems that Vasily can do no wrong, critically, which is wonderful. And the orchestra works hard because it wants to be the best it can be. There isn't the same "Oh, it's another recording" about it as there is sometimes with London orchestras.'

Recording is stressful in a different way from a live concert performance. 'It's difficult to keep the adrenalin rush,' says Petrenko. 'Recording is a stop-and-go process, and you have to keep the same emotional intensity throughout the session. It's exhausting – the musicians are all knackered by the end!' They've had to rehearse extra





**1. Acoustic:** Liverpool Philharmonic Hall is perfect for Rachmaninov

### 3. Collaboration: Petrenko discusses playbacks with engineer Mike Ognovsky

## 2. Playbacks: Petrenko and members of the orchestra listen to their work

**4. Control room:** Petrenko and Ognovsky are joined by engineer David Pigott

hard to reveal the beauties of Rachmaninov's texturally complex Third Symphony. 'So much information is written on every note, especially in the last movement,' says Petrenko. 'You need to work very hard to get to the depth of the piece, to attend to every single detail while still thinking about the long lines.' He believes that Rachmaninov was pouring his homesickness and his sorrow about the fate of modern Russia into the score. 'It's a very philosophical symphony, which explains why it wasn't particularly well received at its premiere. The audience was expecting big Romantic tunes, but instead it has a lot of articulation and details and drama in it. It's a more punchy style because Rachmaninov had absorbed a lot of American music, including Broadway and jazz.'

'The first movement starts with a little motif – like something from the Orthodox Church service – that triggers all the memories: the pain, the longing, everything he had experienced. The third movement starts like a celebration, then it seems to go over the top – everyone goes mad. That's what he thought about the second Revolution. He still believed that some spiritual army would come along and transform Russia, but by the end of the symphony it hasn't happened yet.'

Alongside this late work, the CD includes *Caprice bohémien* from Rachmaninov's post-student days, and the middle-period Vocalise. 'It's interesting to see how Rachmaninov changed over his lifespan. I want to show he wasn't just the composer of the Second Piano Concerto.' When I ask Petrenko if he's happy with today's recording, he's surprised. 'Of course! It always goes well when I work with John. He shares what I feel about the music and it's a natural process for us both. The sessions were a success; the orchestra is on top form and I hope for a great result!' **G**

► To read Gramophone's review, turn to page 49

# Make New Discoveries



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**GRAS**  
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Juliette Hurel, Philippine Graffin

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**TIMPANI**  
**CRAS**  
**QUINTET FOR PIANO & STRINGS**  
Alain Jacquot, Quartet Louvigny

channel



**TIMPANI**  
**CRAS**  
**WORKS FOR ORCHESTRA**  
Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg

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Log Souls of [Cherokee Legend](#) the [Tulsa](#)  
& [Haskell](#) [Plano](#) [Museum](#)



**FOOTPRINT**  
**DI LASSO, PALESTRINA**  
**ALONG UNCHARTED ROUTES**  
**SARINOU**

"an enterossino recita!" Gramophone

100



**SLEEVELESS  
LISZT  
DEPICTIONS (WORKS FOR PIANO)  
Warren Malley-Smith**

**Keywords:** *Self-esteem, self-esteem threat, self-esteem threat sensitivity, self-esteem threat sensitivity scale, self-esteem threat sensitivity scale-2*



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## DISCOVERY RECORDS

# Beethoven's piano sonatas

Pianist *Jonathan Biss* compares battered editions with Geoffrey Norris

It's slightly embarrassing to turn up to a meeting with Jonathan Biss armed with my battered, bruised, dog-eared Schirmer volumes of Beethoven sonatas, 'revised and fingered by Dr Hans von Bülow and Dr Sigmund Lebert', copyright 1894. Biss, I think to myself with a great deal of apprehension, is embarking on a complete cycle of the sonatas and will have gleaned much broader and more authoritative information on textual matters from other editions than these. For me, they bring back boyhood memories of simply trying to get my fingers round the notes rather than worrying whether a slur might be in the wrong place or a pedal marking a beat too early. The state of the volumes might even indicate the occasional frustrated childhood tantrum. 'They've certainly seen action,' Biss says as we sit down to chat, the loose pages and torn yellow covers from my scores scattering themselves willy-nilly over the table.

'Actually, you know, Schirmer isn't bad,' Biss says reassuringly, 'but most of my work is done with the Henle edition and with Universal' – which is the famous, scrupulous edition published in 1923 by the scholar and music analyst Heinrich Schenker. 'I've looked at manuscripts and I do have a third edition, which is the one done by Artur Schnabel [originally published by Edizioni Curci in Milan], because it's so fascinating. I have to say that very often when

*'It's moving to look at because of the ferocity of the handwriting – but how did anyone figure out what was meant?'*

there's a discrepancy, Universal is the more faithful.' He mulls things over for a moment and then turns to the very end of the Op 26 Sonata in A flat. There is a pedal marking, indicated by 'Ped.' in my score. 'In the Universal/Schenker edition, it's marked *con sordino*,' explains Biss. 'There is no practical difference, since in Beethoven's day *con sordino* meant the sustaining pedal, but it's strange to write *con sordino* rather than "pedale", which he normally did. I assume Schenker wouldn't have put the words there unless they came from Beethoven. So when there are substantive differences, it makes me suspect that the Schenker edition has a faithfulness about it.'

Biss continues, 'I'm always a bit suspicious with Henle, although it's an Urtext, that there is a kind of editorial bias towards wanting to be clean. You look at one manuscript of Beethoven and you realise that "clean" was not high up in the list of priorities. One of the



Jonathan Biss: placing a special focus upon Beethoven

facsimiles I'm lucky enough to have is of Op 111. It's a moving thing to look at because of the ferocity of the handwriting – but how on earth did anyone figure out what was meant? Even though I know the piece I can barely read it. Imagine the engraver trying to figure out what the notes were.'

Biss's thoughts, however, go beyond the mere signs on the page, and it is scarcely surprising that his Beethoven recording enterprise will extend over a full nine years. 'I'm 31,' he says, 'and I didn't think it was the right time in my life to say I'd do the Beethoven cycle and put away all other music. I thought it wouldn't be good for my Beethoven-playing either.' So he continues to work in other areas but with a special focus on Beethoven. 'Right now,' he says, 'I'm working on Op 31 No 1, and there are many places where things are changed dynamically between the exposition and the recapitulation. It's easy to go down one path and think, "That motif does rise an octave this time so maybe Beethoven didn't want the *crescendo* quite so early," but then you start to wonder whether you're not over-thinking all this. Not everything is necessarily rich with meaning. Faithfulness involves thinking that everything you see marked on the page has religion behind it. I try to be conscientious as far as possible in the question of respecting the composer but sometimes I wonder if being so attuned to the micro-level means that you can sometimes miss the larger messages. You have to find some point where your approach meets that of the music. It's not about putting one over the other. It's possible to fuse the two.' **G**

► The first instalment of Jonathan Biss's Beethoven cycle (Op 10 No 1, Opp 22 and 26, and Les adieux, Op 81a), is reviewed on page 61



## The historical view

### Edwin Fischer

(Beethoven's Piano Sonatas)

For Beethoven, the sonata form is not a scheme that can be used in caprice one day and abandoned the next. This form dominates everything he imagines and composes; it is the very mark of his creation and the form of his thought – an inherent form, a natural one.

### Glenn Gould

(The Glenn Gould Reader)

[In the early sonatas] Beethoven's senses of structure, fantasy, variety, thematic continuity, harmonic propulsion and contrapuntal discipline were absolutely, immaculately in alignment...[In] the Sonatas Opp 26 and 28...every texture is as carefully worked out as it would be in a string quartet.

### Alfred Brendel

(Alfred Brendel on Music)

'Beethoven's C minor Sonata, Op 111, leaves a dual impression – it is the final testimony of his sonatas as well as a prelude to silence. Its two movements confront each other as thesis and antithesis...or the masculine and feminine principles which Beethoven himself was so fond of expounding.



## QUIZ



PHOTOGRAPHY: LEBRECHT MUSIC AND ARTS/ALAMY

The world of the gods concerned my husband greatly

## Who am I?

Pit your wits against Gramophone

**I** was born out of wedlock, the second child of illustrious parents. They separated when I was barely two years old, leaving me in the care of my grandmother.

**My first marriage was to my music teacher who had been one of my father's pupils. The marriage wasn't happy and, for a time, I even contemplated suicide.**

Instead I had a passionate affair with my husband's – more famous – colleague, a man 24 years my senior, with whom I quickly had two children.

**I was a Catholic, however, and my father was deeply involved in the church. It was only after I converted to Protestantism that I could remarry.**

It was for my sake that my new spouse penned one of his most intimate works. The story of its first, surprise performance is the stuff of romantic legend.

**After my second husband's death, I eventually emerged from my self-imposed seclusion to govern the festival he had founded – a role which I continued for the next 23 years.**

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The answer was **Amaryllis Fleming**

The first correct answer drawn was submitted by David Gardner of Ottawa, Canada, who wins a selection of CDs.

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# PURITY & POWER

THE BEST CONCERT HALL COMBINES CRYSTAL-CLEAR ACOUSTICS WITH BREATHTAKING ARCHITECTURE. WE LOOK AT TEN OF THE MILLENNIUM'S MOST INSPIRING STRUCTURES

**NOMINATED BY:**  
**MANUEL BRUG**

*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*

**MICHAEL HAMMOND**

*The New York Times*, *The World Architectural Review*,  
*Architectural Record*, *Architectural Digest*

**PHILIP KENNICOTT**

*Culture*, *The Washington Post*

**ADRIAN MOURBY**

*Wallpaper\**, *Architectural Record*, *Architectural Digest*

**GEOFFREY NORRIS**

*Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*





Over much of the past century, it has often seemed that there is an either-or choice between great architecture and great acoustics. The Danish architect Jørn Utzon's Sydney Opera House, finished in 1973, was a classic case: an enduring architectural icon that defines its city in the public imagination, but is filled with performing spaces with problematic sound. Several high-profile acoustic failures, such as the original Philharmonic Hall opened at New York's Lincoln Center in 1962, made the conflict appear intractable. Fear crept into the psychology of concert hall design. Architects, inspired by ideas of openness and egalitarianism, fought for utopian forms while clients – wealthy donors, municipalities, state agencies and boards of directors – worried about deviations from the tried and true.

That long and unproductive era of experiment, failure and retrenchment may finally be over. Even as classical music fights for survival in an age of cultural fracturing and seemingly infinite entertainment options, there is dawning a new golden age of the concert hall. Advances in acoustics, increasingly sophisticated computer modelling and a better understanding of the politics of concert hall design – how to resolve the inevitable tensions between client, architect and acoustician – have largely resolved the dichotomy between how a building looks and how it sounds. Brilliant acousticians such as Yasuhisa Toyota, who has worked productively with star architects such as Frank Gehry, are beginning to rack up a long list of success stories. And they are unleashing a burst of creativity in design that is allowing architects to reconnect with old ideals of modernism: making culture more accessible, transparent and democratic.

Gehry's Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles has windows that allow natural light into the auditorium during matinees. It's a small detail but emblematic of the possibilities now available to designers. The hall has been symbolically reconnected to the outside world, without any loss to what most critics consider its admirable clarity and warmth of sound.

Concert halls and opera houses are also learning how to behave better in their urban environments. The days of separating a new performance space, such as the Opéra Bastille in Paris, from the city by busy roads and forbidding fortress-like facades are probably over, too. Cities, in large measure reborn by the cultural economy, are loath to invest in cultural venues that are open only for performances, and only to those who can afford a ticket. The Oslo Opera House, designed by the innovative Snøhetta firm and opened in 2008, seems to rise out of the waters of the Oslofjord. It was designed, from the beginning, to be both architecturally striking and inviting to the

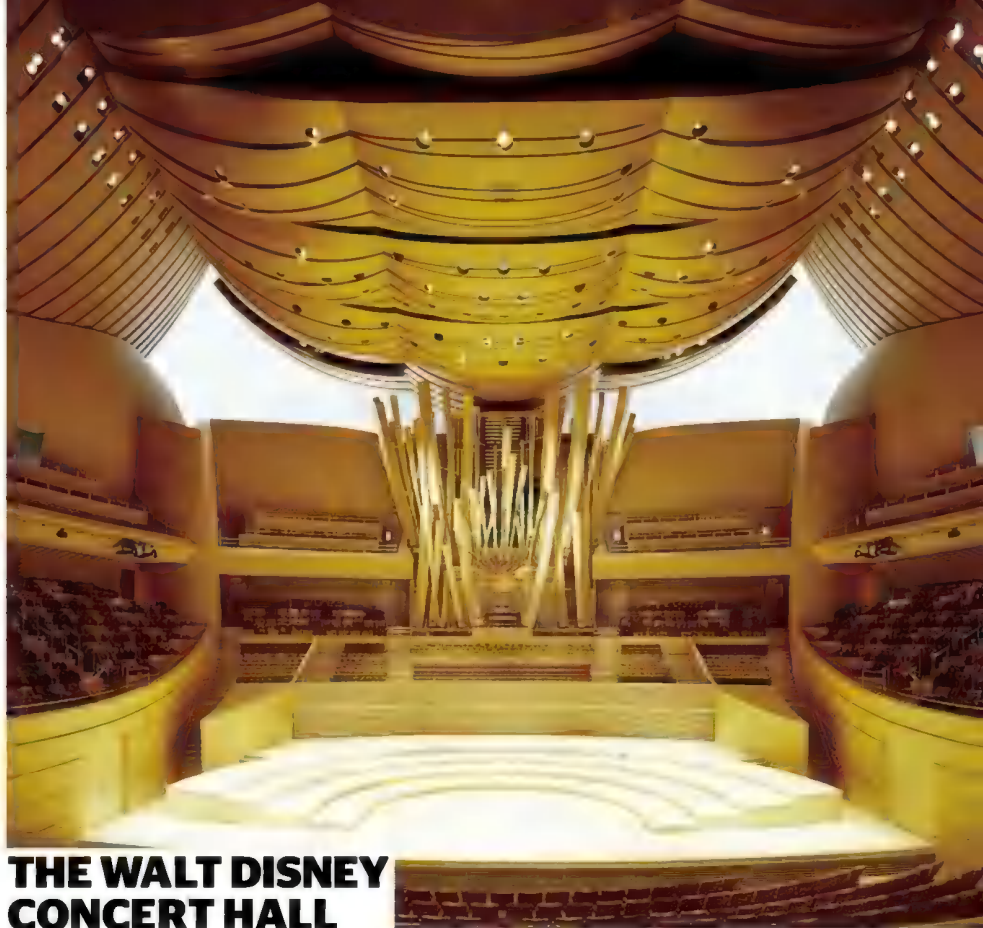
general population. You don't need a ticket to enjoy its views of the water. And skateboarders have been given rights to use part of its landscape. The new Herzog & de Meuron-designed Elbphilharmonie, rising atop an old warehouse on the waterfront of Hamburg, will also have a public plaza, animating and giving glamour to one of the city's grittiest areas.

In New York, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, perhaps infamous for having designed a temporary pavilion for the 2002 Swiss Expo made of metal and water vapour, have been invited to reinvigorate the 1960s-era Lincoln Center. The result is a striking urban transformation of a performance campus originally set upon a plinth, grandly remote from street life. Next to the enormous bulk of the Metropolitan Opera House, a tilted plane of grass covers a restaurant, and invites sunbathers to catch the rays in the middle of Manhattan.

Perhaps it's no accident that a new age of design innovation has arrived just as classical music faces its most critical struggle to retain and capture new audiences. Performance venues don't just contain music, they compete for attention. They make the case for culture, and impress upon the distracted passer-by the importance of the art inside. Santiago Calatrava's Tenerife Auditorium in Spain sits beside a port facility, full of container ships and other industrial detritus. No surprise, then, that it tries so hard to be visually seductive, with its curved roofline like the wing of a bird.

The challenge, going forward, will be to remember the purist, who cares solely for great music in ideal acoustics, who couldn't care less whether a building looks like a shoe box or a crumpled lump of aluminum foil. With concert halls such as Gehry's ingenious gem built for Michael Tilson Thomas's New World Symphony in Miami, which uses state-of-the-art lighting and video projection, the huge possibilities for reinventing music as a visual medium are clear. And some would argue that the future of music doesn't rest in the concert hall at all, but in getting musicians out into the world, to perform in perhaps less inspiring spaces – schools, parks, shopping malls – that are nevertheless closer to the fickle audience.

But the imaginative and sentimental attachment to the traditional concert experience can't be neglected. And that may present the hardest architectural challenge. No matter what else a concert hall is designed to do, when the music starts the architecture must disappear. Space and distance collapse, the music seems to be everywhere and nowhere, and the listener becomes blissfully detached from the three-dimensional world. Architects have always envied composers their ability to create spaces of pure emotion and inward experience. But they aren't composers, and sometimes their job is to stay out of the way. **Philip Kennicott**



## THE WALT DISNEY CONCERT HALL

Location: Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, US  
Architect: Gehry Partners, LLP  
Acoustician: Yasuhisa Toyota, Nagata Acoustics  
Date opened: October 24, 2003

Walt Disney Concert Hall: part of the fabric of LA

The Walt Disney Hall Concert Hall was the main goal of my entire tenure at the LA Philharmonic, the main focus from day one. The project was up and down, came to a halt a few times, finally got going again – there was not one day during that time when I wouldn't have thought about it, or been doing something connected with it.

The miracle or masterpiece quality of that design is that wherever you sit in the hall you never have the feeling of being far from the performers. So despite the volume, which is

The hall was a gift from Disney's widow, Lillian



huge, we have the feeling that we're not playing to an anonymous mass but to a couple of thousand individuals.

Frank [Gehry] was very clear that he wanted to build the perfect concert hall, not an ego trip. We also talked a lot about what the role of a concert hall should be. I was a child of the '60s and '70s, when the idea of the concert hall was as a shrine, on a tall site, that you'd approach as if it were a cathedral or temple. There never was the feeling of such a building being approachable or accessible, and of concert-hall music, or classical music, being a part of wider life. We felt the Walt Disney Concert Hall had to be different.

I remember walking in two months after it opened and saw a newly-wed couple having photographs taken against the hall, and a fashion photoshoot going on elsewhere, and I thought: we have become part of the fabric of LA. For a town challenged by its geography and traffic, in which most of the architecture is private, and with a complex demographic structure, I felt the Walt Disney Concert Hall had become a symbol of the forward-looking side of LA – the one that reflects the young, dynamic side of the city.

**ESA-PEKKA SALONEN**  
MUSIC DIRECTOR  
LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC, 1992-2009





The park's three concert halls are named after Goffredo Petrassi, Giuseppe Sinopoli and St Cecilia

Parco della Musica: home of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia

## PARCO DELLA MUSICA

Location: Viale de Coubertin, Rome, Italy

Architect: Renzo Piano

Date opened: December 21, 2002

**Renzo Piano's Parco della Musica, opened in 2002, changed the face and focus of concert life in Rome, previously based at the much smaller and acoustically inadequate auditorium on the Via della Conciliazione, just down from St Peter's.**

The three halls that make up Piano's complex – the Sala Santa Cecilia (2800 seats), Sala Sinopoli (1200) and Sala Petrassi (700) – revitalised the former Olympics site north of the Piazza del Popolo. Seen from above, they have been variously likened to beetles or computer mice, but inside they are light, airy and adaptable.

Drawbacks of the main hall: no organ; a 'health and safety' barrier round the gallery obscuring vision; a stage so high that the view for front stalls patrons is primarily of the players' feet. But the natural materials of the interiors make the acoustic almost ideal, and the warm colour schemes induce a sense of well-being. **Geoffrey Norris**







## OSLO OPERA HOUSE

Location: Bjørvika, Oslo, Norway  
 Architect: Snøhetta  
 Acoustician: Arup Associates  
 Date opened: April 12, 2008

The main stage curtains are by American artist Pae White, using a mix of wool, polyester and cotton

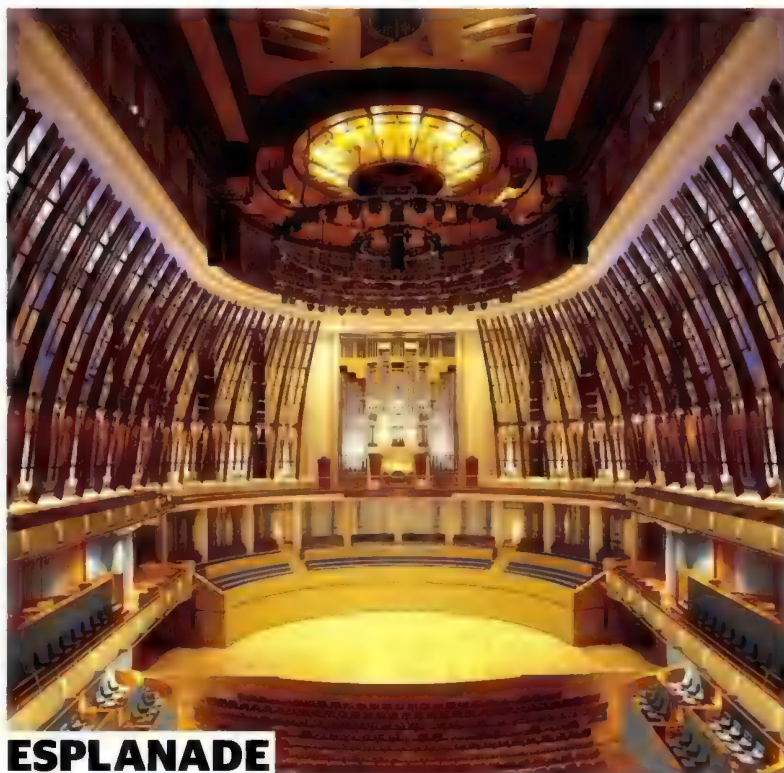
**The Operahuset, or Oslo Opera House, has** proved a remarkably successful building, although the general view remains that there is a lot of bloom to the sound and that the overall building is more visually stunning than its auditorium. The brief to architects Snøhetta was to create a new home for Norwegian National Opera and Ballet that would be 'accessible'. The location, Oslo's Bjørvika neighbourhood, was chosen because it was in need of urban renewal. The building had a subsidiary role of spearheading dockland redevelopment. Snøhetta opted for a roofline that rose up from the waterline and the structure has been likened both to an iceberg and a stealth bomber that has crashed into Oslofjord. The edges of the building can be used as a diving platform where they meet the water, and visitors can also walk up its sloping walls to the very top to admire the view. Passers-by often find themselves wandering into this fun structure without realising they have entered a concert hall. **Adrian Mourby**

The Operahuset has won many awards, including the 2009 EU Prize for Contemporary Architecture





On the waterfront: the Esplanade Concert Hall, Singapore



## ESPLANADE

Location: Marina Bay, Singapore  
 Architect: DPA: Michael Wilford & Partners  
 Acoustician: Russell Johnson, Artec Consultants  
 Date opened: October 12, 2002

**Few concert venues can boast the impressive state-of-the-art acoustic of Singapore's Esplanade Concert Hall.** Part of a purpose-built centre for performing arts on Marina Bay, the hall can adjust sound resonance and brightness via an 'acoustic canopy' of mobile reflectors above the stage and a 'reverberation chamber', comprising 84 computer-operated doors and flaps hidden behind its walls. It is also soundproofed, giving visitors the disconcerting impression of walking into a vacuum when empty of musicians and audiences.

With all its audio concern, one might expect a less than elegant visual impact. But the sophisticated acoustic technology is all the more impressive for its seamless integration into the hall's circular design. On the outside, two glass domes covered in triangular aluminium shades enclose the space – often described as giant insect eyes, and every bit as iconic as Sydney's avant-garde opera house. **Charlotte Smith**

## 'WE ALWAYS NEED TO HAVE MUSIC' – THE ACOUSTIC EXPERT



We work with natural acoustics – so we do not use a sound system – which are affected by architectural features, such as ceiling height, room dimensions, raw materials. These are also very important to an architect, so we are working together on the same elements. They are working in a visual way, we are working in an acoustic way. So the collaboration is very, very important.

We construct a scale model – 1:10 – of the concert hall, which is very large. The main reason for this is to detect detrimental echoes. The great advantage is we can use actual sound. Usually this process takes five or six months – and then we start to build the hall.

In terms of recording or broadcasting, our job is to

## ELBPHILHARMONIE HAMBURG

Location: HafenCity, Hamburg, Germany  
 Architect: Herzog & de Meuron  
 Acoustician: Yasuhisa Toyota, Nagata Acoustics  
 Date opened: planned for 2012

### Ever since Jørn Utzon transformed Sydney

forever with his boundary-pushing opera house in the '60s, harbourside sites have been favourites with city planners anxious to capitalise on the wider impact of iconic architecture.

The Elbphilharmonie Hamburg is an inevitable result when engaging architects of the calibre of Herzog & de Meuron to design a concert hall on such a prominent waterside site. Drawing on their extraordinary success with London's Tate Modern, now the world's most visited cultural venue, the architects have pushed further and provided a dramatic addition to the cityscape.

The completed building will include a 220-room hotel, restaurants, a gym and apartments, further morphing the traditional typology of a concert hall with the demands of a 21st century city.

The Elbphilharmonie will transform not just a derelict warehouse, or the HafenCity quarter, but arguably Hamburg itself. **Michael Hammond**



The Elbphilharmonie will tower above the old port area of Hamburg

provide wonderful natural acoustics. But finding the ideal position for the microphone – this is not our job.

Acoustics, especially in concert halls, are not simple. We always need to have music. Nothing is happening in an empty hall – so when we evaluate acoustics, when we listen to acoustics, we have the musicians on stage. In a concert, even the same conductor, orchestra and work – today, and tomorrow – will sound different. They cannot repeat that performance. Music is mysterious. Acoustics are mysterious things.

### YASUHISA TOYOTA

PRESIDENT, NAGATA ACOUSTICS USA

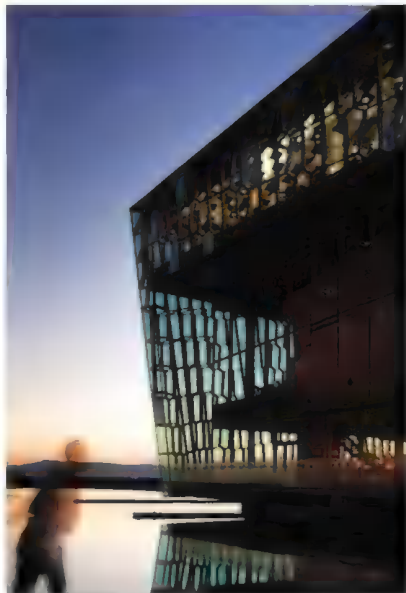
# HARPA REYKJAVÍK

Location: Reykjavík, Iceland  
Architect: Henning Larsen Architects  
Acoustician: Artec Consultants  
Date opened: August 20, 2008

**The magnificent Harpa concert hall,** located on Reykjavík harbourside, is unusually defined by its facade. It's a powerful statement created by fusing the creative visions of Danish firm Henning Larsen Architects and internationally acclaimed artist, Olafur Eliasson. The sparkling glazed fenestrations transform the public areas, which are now often seen as being almost as important as the performing spaces themselves.

Advances in acoustic technology over the past few decades have now removed the mystique in designing auditoria; much of this work now falls to specialist engineers.

It is probably no coincidence that although Eliasson is Danish, his parents are Icelandic, allowing the citizens of Iceland to have at least part ownership in this world-class success at a difficult time in their history. **Michael Hammond**



The facade was designed by artist Olafur Eliasson



## DR CONCERT HALL

Location: Copenhagen, Denmark  
Architect: Jean Nouvel  
Acoustician: Yasuhisa Toyota, Nagata Acoustics  
Date opened: January 17, 2009

**In marked contrast to the masculine,** ordered browns and blacks of Helsinki's new Musiikkitalo, Danish Broadcasting's new concert hall in Copenhagen is assuredly female inside; sultry, curvaceous and clothed in aromatic reds and oranges. It's also spatially deceptive – a dreamlike melting of the vineyard terraces that plays as much with expected architectural biorhythms as the new auditorium in Hamburg is set to. And just as that venue is on course to be the world's most expensive, so too was this when it was

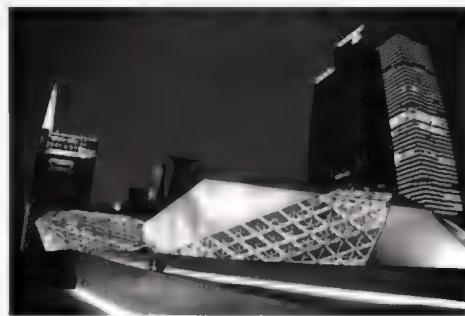
inaugurated by the Danish National Symphony Orchestra in 2009. Back then people spoke of a disappointing acoustic, but in truth it was probably more that the orchestra hadn't had time to get used to playing here. These days the hall sounds clear and lively, but controversies remain: its out-of-town position and extortionate cost have had repercussions throughout Denmark's musical and broadcasting communities, but they'll be outlived by the boldness and wonder of Nouvel's interior. **Andrew Mellor**

## HALL SEEKS ORCHESTRA

Once upon a time the world was full of great musical institutions seeking facilities worthy of them. I grew up watching Welsh National Opera try to squeeze its ambitions into Cardiff's ancient New Theatre. In Toronto, the Canadian Opera Company was having similar problems. So were the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic and Texas Ballet Theater.

Not everyone was suffering. During the 1990s Japan built 27 new concert halls although only six of them were to serve resident orchestras. But in western Europe we lagged behind. It was very depressing in 1995 to see a new house for WNO by Zaha Hadid rejected by the funding bodies. Eventually a compromise multipurpose venue, the Wales Millennium Centre, was built and the company took up residence in 2004. Ironically they've had troubled times since, with only Bryn Terfel's debut as Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger* being up to the standard of the old New Theatre triumphs.

In the meantime, Japan has scaled down its venue-building – only eight concert halls since the year 2000 – and China seems poised to take over. Since 2007 the People's Republic has



Guangzhou Opera House

constructed three concert halls and two opera houses including Guangzhou, the first opera house designed by the visionary Zaha Hadid to be built. It's a beautiful, ground-breaking £130m building, though there is still no resident company to make use of its state-of-the-art facilities.

This pattern of great empty buildings seems set to be repeated across China now as the country asserts its global importance; there are also similarly splendid new concert halls and opera houses planned for construction in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, but again there are no resident companies desperate to occupy them.

The old European problem is being inverted around the world. Because new music venues are looked upon as symbols of economic success we are facing a future with lots of first-class venues (once their teething problems are sorted) but not enough first-class ensembles to fill them. It's a question of being careful what you wish for: new buildings are not enough.

### ADRIAN MOURBY

INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURE  
CORRESPONDENT, OPERA NOW





## NEW WORLD CENTER

Location: Miami Beach, Florida, US  
 Architect: Gehry Partners, LLP  
 Acoustician: Yasuhisa Toyota, Nagata Acoustics  
 Date opened: January 25, 2011

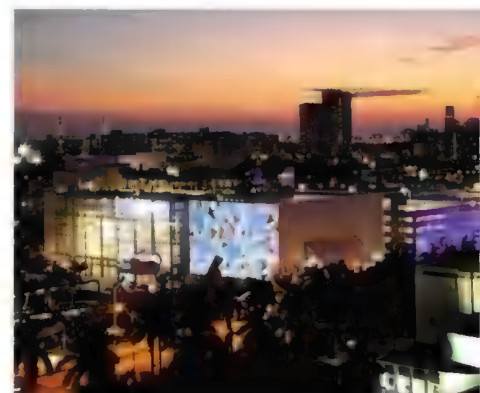
**I've known Frank Gehry since I was a kid** and he has a great love of classical music. We had talked over the years about what a concert hall could do. In this case, the hall at the New World Center is the campus of the New World Symphony, 'America's Orchestral Academy', so the building had to reflect that with lots of practice and ensemble rooms, and places to carry on all our long-distance learning. The hall itself is small - it only seats 750 people - but it's appropriate for serving the purposes of the Academy. There's also a large rehearsal room and other ensemble rooms, so lots of rehearsals can go on simultaneously.

I originally knew Yasu [Yasuhisa Toyota, acoustician] back in Japan where I ran the Pacific Music Festival. We had a warm relationship, and I was able to say to him, 'I want an acoustic where you can float the note but still have clarity'. When the building was opened, by design it was quite reverberant - after two months we undertook the first of several tweaks to turn it down, and I'm now very happy with it. A real test for the hall was when we performed Janáček's Sinfonietta recently, for which we used the hall's multiple stages - it was breathtaking. Soon afterwards,

Jordi Savall did a solo gamba recital and it was fabulous - so intimate and focused. We have a certain control over acoustics, but that's only necessary during rehearsals - for performances, the acoustic just adapts itself to the music that's being performed.

The mission when we started was to encourage the fellows [students] to be music communicators. To that end, a lot of thought went into how the building looks. When you approach it, you can see through the glass and you're compelled to go in. Once inside, you see all these fantastically shaped structures - unmistakably Frank Gehry. We're exploring a more impulsive approach to concert-going - there are some concerts that are only half an hour long so that, if people are in the area, they can just drop in. In the same way, thousands of people come to see our concerts projected live on the screen outside the building.

The Center has been transformative to Miami - it has created a whole new feeling of a city centre. To have this magnificent building and park given over nearly all the time to very sophisticated things - our concerts, a whole array of video art that's exhibited - is a wonderful thing.



Redefining communities: the New World Center

**MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS**  
 ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
 NEW WORLD SYMPHONY



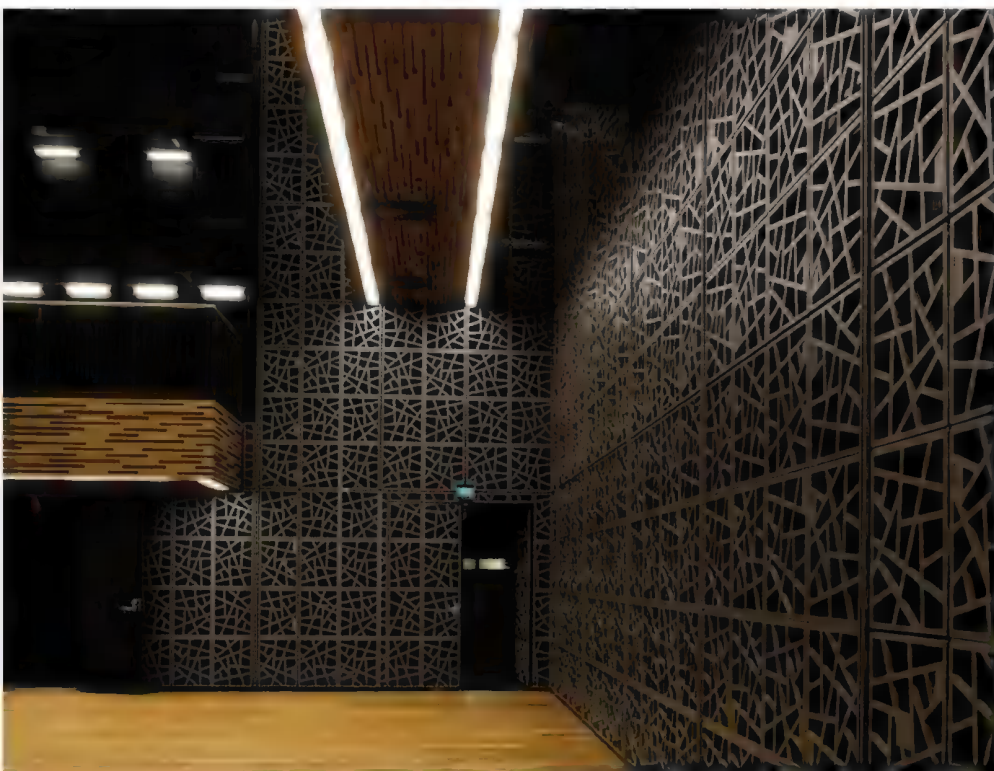


## MUSIIKKITALO

Location: Töölönlahti, Helsinki, Finland  
 Architect: Marko Kivistö, LPR Architects  
 Acoustician: Yasuhisa Toyota, Nagata Acoustics  
 Date opened: August 31, 2011

The hall is the answer to a need expressed since Sibelius conducted in the city's university

LPR Architects' winning bid was titled 'A Mezza Voce'



**Helsinki already has two halls by Alvar Aalto** – the brickstone House of Culture and the Finlandia Hall, looking like a marmorial cliff. Both of them are actually more famous for their design than for their acoustic. It took 20 years of planning, some diplomacy and €165m finally to open the Musiikkitalo in August 2011. Prominently situated between the bay, Parliament, park and National Museum, it is the new home for the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Helsinki Philharmonic and the Sibelius Academy with its 1500 students. The democratic Musiikkitalo deliberately reveals its treasures only after one actually enters the building. In the lobby, huge panoramic windows look into the dark-stained concert hall. Not only does the rather understated building have an auditorium with 1700 seats and five smaller halls – there are also three saunas. The stairs and stand of the auditorium are dazzling; the asymmetrical seats remind one of jammed rafts. The big hall resonates richly, but at the same time transparently: acoustics guru Yasuhisa Toyota was involved in the planning process from the start and did a great job here, where it is all about communication and not about worship. **Manuel Brug**



## THE SAGE GATESHEAD

Location: Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, UK  
 Architect: Foster and Partners  
 Acoustician: Arup Associates  
 Date opened: December 17, 2004

**Viewed from Newcastle, The Sage Gateshead** looks like a glass chrysalis abandoned on the shores of the river Tyne. This curved structure is a carapace enclosing three performance spaces, an increasingly common venue concept. The 1700-seater main hall has a warm and enveloping acoustic that offers clarity with reverberance. There's good support for chamber orchestras yet the hall is never too loud for a large symphony orchestra. Modelled on the Musikverein in Vienna, Sage 1 has ceiling panels and curtains that can be raised and lowered to change the sound-profile of the hall. The glass carapace makes good use of the view over the river Tyne and has made the building very popular. For too many years both Newcastle and Gateshead seemed to their backs on the river that had nurtured them. The Sage is a real step forward. **Adrian Mourby** 



The Sage's three halls are structurally completely separate

The Sage: home of the Northern Sinfonia





# HAUNTING, POTENT, EXPERIMENTAL...

BÉLA BARTÓK'S MUSIC TAKES LISTENERS  
ON A JOURNEY THROUGH FOLKLORE AND  
FANTASY. ROB COWAN OFFERS A GUIDE  
TO EXPLORING HIS COMPELLING GENIUS



My baptism into Béla Bartók's musical world was as a tender 14-year-old. We were about to go on a family holiday. As the suitcases were being loaded into the car, I was twiddling with the radio dial and unexpectedly chanced upon some exotic but absorbing music. A slow, heaving waltz was accelerating by the second. Then, responding to yelps from the brass, a pair of trombones barged in with jazzy syncopations and before I could catch my breath I was sitting goggle-eyed as strings and percussion set out helter-skelter for a fugual riot. 'I must have this,' I thought to myself, and with one fell swoop my £2 holiday money was spent – though the other hotel guests didn't thank me when I commandeered the ballroom radiogram for a sampling of my much-prized LP acquisition. The work in question was the Suite from the ballet *The Miraculous Mandarin*, in a still-unrivalled Mercury recording by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Antal Dorati. It's powerfully haunting music that for me served as a soundtrack for images of backstreet sleaze and covert violence, the chilling enticements of an unpalatable world where love was sold and there was no added pay-off. It was a life-changing moment.

When it comes to art music and its connection with the modern world, Bartók has no rivals: long thought

soulmate was his compatriot and fellow folksong collector Zoltán Kodály, an important educationist, though I suspect that, in spite of Kodály's many fine musical achievements, posterity will ultimately settle in Bartók's favour.

### PIANISTIC PROWESS

Surveying Bartók's output finds the lion's share of his greatest music located in two genres: pieces for solo piano and for string quartet. The piano works (around six CDs' worth) include a boldly uncompromising Piano Sonata (1926) and the suite *Out of Doors* (1926), which features among its movements an evocative 'Night Music' and a wildly cantering 'Chase' finale that brings to mind the *Mandarin*. The Suite, Op 14 (1916) combines a certain playfulness with more sombre colours; the *Improvisations on Hungarian Peasant Songs* (1920) and *Three Studies*, Op 18 (1918) demonstrate a wide range of characteristically Bartókian gestures and techniques; and the dazzlingly varied, post-impressionist Bagatelles, Op 6 (1908) still await the wider recognition that is surely their due. There are educational piano miniatures (including the 153 pieces that make up the kaleidoscopic series *Mikrokosmos*, 1926-39), folk dances, elegies, sketches and children's pieces – all informed by



Bartók, Joseph Szigeti and Benny Goodman rehearsing the composer's 1938 trio *Contrasts*, which they recorded in 1940

## 'BARTÓK WAS A LONER AMONG THE MUSICAL MAVERICKS OF HIS DAY'

of as 'difficult', he is now considered anything but (evidenced by the fact that many of the concerts in Esa-Pekka Salonen's recent celebration of Bartók at London's Southbank Centre were completely sold out). With his feet planted firmly among the roots of local folklore (a villager at heart, he was a keen ethnomusicologist), Bartók has become, in symbolic terms, a man of our time, and his candid musical expressions of sexually fraught relationships mean that nowadays he'd pass even the most stringent reality check. Mystery abounds in Bartók's music, though never in the guise of organised religion. The violinist Stefi Geyer, a favoured squeeze (at least in theory), broke with him principally because of his atheism; though for powerful handling of symbolic myth it would be hard to upstage his raw and mysterious *Cantata profana* (1930). His was above all a dancing muse who took rhythm as her starting point, often reaching levels of energy that even Stravinsky and Prokofiev would have found difficult to maintain.

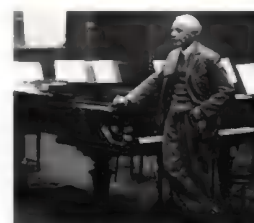
Bartók, whose health was invariably frail, was a loner among the musical mavericks of his day. Light years removed from the cerebral adventurers of the Second Viennese School (whose 'madness' was more in their methods than in their hearts), he was more red-blooded than the often ritualistic Stravinsky, less belligerent than the young Prokofiev and less politically motivated than his even younger contemporary Shostakovich, though he made a firm political stand in the late 1930s by making the painful decision to leave his native Hungary as the situation in Europe worsened. Bartók's nearest

the same irresistible blend of earth and air, and all deeply personal in their musical language. (And who but Bartók could have made two pianos and a varied battery of percussion – the Sonata of 1937 – tussle, loiter or laugh as effectively and rhythmically as he did?)

Bartók as pianist was the virtual equal of his contemporary Rachmaninov. He first played the piano in public at the age of 11 and in 1907 was appointed piano professor at the Budapest Academy. He toured widely and made a number of 78rpm recordings, but his later records offer only limited evidence of his towering pianistic and interpretative abilities. Best are CD transfers of 78s featuring the Suite, Op 14, the first of the *Two Romanian Dances*, and a live Library of Congress acetate-derived recording of Debussy's Violin Sonata (with favoured playing partner Joseph Szigeti); but perhaps most impressive of all is a sonically challenged quarter-hour's worth of Bartók playing his Second Piano Concerto (released from private sources by Hungaroton), where the combination of what sounds like (but isn't) ecstatic rhapsodising and effortless virtuosity is fully on a par with Rachmaninov playing his concertos.

### A STRING QUARTET ODYSSEY

It's often claimed that Bartók's cycle of six quartets is the greatest since Beethoven's, a viewpoint I heartily endorse. (Not surprisingly, complete sets have featured regularly in the *Gramophone* Awards: from the Tokyo, the Emerson – Record of the Year in 1989 ▶



Diversity: Bartók the ethnomusicologist uses a phonograph to record folksongs during his travels in Transylvania (top); Bartók the pianist – on a par with his contemporary Rachmaninov (above)



The composer's muse: violinist Stefi Geyer inspired Bartók, who wrote his First Violin Concerto for her

– and the Takács quartets.) The ‘official’ First Quartet (1908), with its thematic references to Stefi Geyer, is both the most expansive and the most romantic of the set. With the arrival of the Second Quartet (1917), Bartók’s tonality becomes more ambiguous, and the faster music more aggressively driven, specifically in the often eerie second movement. The middle quartets are uncompromisingly austere. The Third (1927) is taut, concise and ultimately apocalyptic; the Fourth (1928), angular, texturally experimental and rhythmically confrontational. That’s the one that youngsters tend to go for, especially the finale, a sort of breathless war dance. Years ago when I ran a record shop, a group of lads came in wanting to sample a particular LP that reminded me of this finale; afterwards I played the Bartók to them, and that’s what they eventually bought! The marginally more amiable and subtle Fifth Quartet (1934; perhaps the highlight of the series) glances sideways towards elements of jazz; and the Sixth (1939) is – miraculously, given

suite, 1927). The story concerns a hapless girl forced to act as a sexual decoy so that one victim after another is ensnared, robbed and thrown back on to the street, until an exotic and majestic Mandarin climbs the stairs, rises to the bait, is harangued and tortured, but will not die until the girl gives herself to him. Lurid or compassionate? Or both? The Suite leaves the story unfinished (the pathetic denouement comes later on in the score), but I’d already learnt enough through it – not least that, for all its implied violence, this was still relatively ‘early’ Bartók and the toughest nuts were still out there waiting to be cracked. Although modernist in concept and provocative in its plot (it was originally banned), *Mandarin* offered but a hint of the fully ‘mature’ Bartók. In fact all three of Bartók’s stage works predate the painstakingly organised, sophisticated and often barbed sound worlds that formed the core of his work from the 1920s onwards.

His only opera, *Bluebeard’s Castle* (1911–12, rev 1918), approached eroticism from an entirely

## ‘WITH BARTÓK “SOUL” IS PROBABLY THE MOST ABIDING QUALITY’

Bartók’s state of mind as war grew closer – warmly stoical, mysterious and full of zany humour.

### BALLET AND OPERA

The Eternal Feminine was for Bartók something of an *idée fixe* (his second wife, Ditta Pásztory, was his junior by some 17 years). His First String Quartet includes ideas inspired by Stefi Geyer, for whom he wrote his First Violin Concerto (1907–08). The Concerto’s first movement is among his most rapturously beautiful early works, later reclaimed for one of his *Two Portraits* (1907–11) as ‘The Ideal’, whereas the second (based on the last of his 14 piano Bagatelles, Op 6) is a vengeful top-speed distortion of the first’s principal theme, cast as a sort of *valse macabre*. Bartók’s Dance Suite (1923) – which celebrates the 50th anniversary of the formation of Budapest – employs both eastern European and Arabic folk music, and the stealthy introduction to the last dance, which suggests a hungry predator slowly drawing in on its prey, is both sinister and erotically suggestive.

These two characteristics – the sinister and the erotic – underpin the work that formed my ‘Bartók epiphany’, *The Miraculous Mandarin* (ballet, 1919;

different standpoint, Bluebeard himself proud but inwardly tortured, wary and very private (not unlike his creator), fascinated by the beautiful creature who enters his realm and whose unrelenting curiosity inevitably causes her downfall. Here, in *Bluebeard*, the tone-painting is more overtly theatrical than in the *Mandarin*, whereas Bartók’s other stage work, the ballet *The Wooden Prince* (1914–17), is the one most redolent of folk music.

Bartók was perhaps the first major musician to assert the notion that the ‘Hungarian’ element in the rhapsodies of Liszt and the dances of Brahms (not to mention various nationalist composers) was not authentic but rather based on folk-like popular songs. In 1904 he made his first notation of a Hungarian peasant song, sung by a young girl, before striking up a lifelong friendship and collaboration with fellow folksong collector Kodály. He was also one of the first musicians to make practical use of Edison’s phonograph: indeed, the results of his 1906 fieldwork are available on CD.

### SUITES AND CONCERTOS

The orchestral masterpieces – and for many people these will be their first encounter with Bartók’s

## BARTÓK... AND HIS ERA



### THE FLEDGLING GENIUS (1881–1900)

Born in Nagyszentmiklós, Hungary (now in Romania), on March 25, 1881, to musical parents. Ernő Dohnányi suggests he should attend the Budapest Academy of Music

Strauss: *Don Juan* (1889); Gëz-S: *The Gondoliers* (1889); Prokofiev born (1891); Anton Rubinstein dies (1894); Johann Strauss dies (1899); Copland born (1900)

### THE ARDENT NATIONALIST (1900–1910)

Composes his Strauss-inspired *Kossuth*, consolidates his interest in genuine folk music and writes his ‘Portrait of a Girl’ for first wife Márta Ziegler. Makes meaningful contact with Kodály

Wignore Hall opens (1901); LSO 1st concert (1904); 1st radio transmission of music (1904); Shostakovich born (1906); Rimsky-Korsakov dies (1908); Stravinsky: *Firebird* (1910)

### FINDING A PERSONAL VOICE (1910–1924)

The stage works: *Bluebeard’s Castle*, *The Wooden Prince*, *The Miraculous Mandarin*. Accused of lacking patriotism because of his articles on Romanian folk music. Tours as pianist

Elgar: *Violin Concerto* (1910); Mahler dies (1911); Debussy: *Jeu* (1913); Leonard Bernstein born (1918); Saint-Saëns & Caruso die (1921); Sibelius *Seventh* (1924)



music – are dominated by the Dance Suite, the precisely targeted tone-painting of the *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* (1936) and the late, relatively mild-mannered Concerto for Orchestra (1943, rev 1945). With music composed after Bartók had arrived in America (late 1940), the Concerto for Orchestra is ostensibly a commission from the great Russian-born entrepreneur-conductor Serge Koussevitzky (though the idea had originated with conductor Fritz Reiner and violinist Szigeti in a bid to help Bartók's dolorous financial predicament). It's a work that seems to take in influences from the wider musical world (including the German Paul Hindemith) in a very peaceable way, even though Bartók defies the dying light with one of his most heroic finales. The Concerto for Orchestra is now among Bartók's most popular works, largely through its accessibility and the absence of those very qualities that make the middle-period compositions so darkly alluring. Bartók's health was probably at its best during the three summers he spent at a sanatorium at the expense of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, and even as late as Christmas 1944 he could claim that 'our modest future is secured for the coming three years'. But it wasn't to be. The Concerto represents in many respects a last ray of light. Prior to its creation, Yehudi Menuhin had commissioned a solo Sonata (1944), which turned out to be the greatest of its kind since Bach. Other late offerings include a straightforward 'fleshing out' (into a concerto) of his Sonata for two pianos and percussion, which Bartók could (and did) play with his wife Ditta (1940).

The other concertos are as unlike as any in the repertoire, with three piano concertos that are by turn boldly experimental (the First, 1926), excitedly conversational (the Second, 1930–31; though wildlife at night take over for the middle movement) and airborne and serene (the not-quite-finished Third Concerto, 1945). They make a wonderful cycle and provide an accurate overview of the composer's evolving maturity. Of the two violin concertos, the Second (1937–38) is the true masterpiece, its third movement ingeniously mirroring its first and with a mass of ideas throughout that are both memorable and thematically engaging. Bartók died with his fitfully beautiful Viola Concerto still largely in sketch form, and although what came down to us at least provided Tibor Serly with a workable project for 'completion', the piece still sounds relatively sparse.

## BARTÓK ON RECORD

So who are the best guides to Bartók's music on disc? Fellow Hungarians Iván Fischer and Zoltán Kocsis are both perceptive and authoritative – Fischer in the orchestral works, Kocsis in both the piano works and, since he's been conducting the Hungarian National Philharmonic, the orchestral compositions, including some that Fischer hasn't yet tackled on CD (the two superb violin rhapsodies, for example, with variants). Pianist András Schiff is a rather gentler Bartókian than Kocsis, and from further back there's Stephen Kovacevich and, most particularly, Géza Anda (a personal favourite, peerless in the concertos) and Andor Foldes (whose mono DG survey of the solo works deserves a comprehensive CD reissue). Sir Georg Solti and Pierre Boulez are highly rated (Boulez's *Cantata profana* is possibly the best ever recorded), but in my book there are two conductors who deserve special mention: Antal Dorati and Ferenc Fricsay. With Dorati you get muscle and drive, with Fricsay energy and, above all, clarity. Both feel the soul of the music, and with Bartók 'soul' is probably the most abiding quality.

## BARTÓK FOR BEGINNERS

The fledgling Bartókian should in the first instance track down Iván Fischer's discs of orchestral works with the Budapest Festival Orchestra, though they have a habit of going in and out of the catalogue. The string quartets are handsomely served, with my own favourites including CDs by the Takács, Juilliard (all three recordings), Végh (both recordings), Tokyo and Hagen quartets; Kocsis's survey of the piano works would take some beating. Recordings of Bartók as pianist are perhaps best left for a little later, once you've absorbed the music and are better placed to appreciate the small print in his playing. The really important thing to remember is that all this music has been crafted by a man with a perfectionist's ear. It craves very close scrutiny: even in the works that superficially pack the most dizzying punch, the genius is in the detail. Bartók can be appreciated at various levels, but the deeper you probe, the more you realise just what a great composer he was. The last century's greatest, perhaps? I would say 'yes'. **G**

► David Patrick Stearns compares the available recordings of Bartók's opera *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* in The Gramophone Collection on page 90

## BARTÓK ON DISC

-  Concerto for Orchestra  
**BFO / I Fischer**  
Philips Ⓢ 456 575-2PH
-  Violin & Viola Concertos  
**Ehnes vtn BBC PO / Noseda**  
Chandos Ⓢ CHAN10690
-  Piano Concertos  
**Anda pf Berlin RSO / Fricsay**  
DG Ⓢ 447 399-2GOR
-  String Quartets  
**Takács Qt Decca** Ⓢ ②  
455 297-2DH2
-  The Miraculous  
Mandarin (complete)  
**Chicago SO / Boulez**  
DG Ⓢ 447 747-2GH
-  Solo Piano Works  
**Kocsis Decca** Ⓢ Ⓢ  
478 2364DB8
-  Bluebeard's Castle  
**Polgár bar Komlóssy sop BFO / I Fischer**  
Channel Ⓢ CCSSA90311

### THE FOLKSONG COLLECTOR (1922–1928)

Divorces his first wife and marries his pupil Ditta Pásztory. Prepares a collection of 3000 Slovak folksongs and writes an extensive study on Romanian Christmas songs

*Satie dies* (1925); *Duke Ellington's 1st records* (1926); *Hans Werner Henze born* (1926); *Theremin invented* (1927); *Jánček dies & Stockhausen born* (1928)

### TOUGH THINKING (1925–1939)

Plays Piano Concerto No 1 at the 1927 ISCM Festival and performs No 2 more than 20 times 1934–41. Innovative and combative middle-period piano works and quartets, and *Cantata profana*

*Diaghilev dies* (1929); *Walton: Belsbazar's Feast* (1931); *Schoenberg finishes 1st two acts of Moses und Aron* (1932); *LPO founded* (1932); *Walton: Violin Concerto* (1939)

### A MAN OF PRINCIPLE (1925–1939)

Forbids his music to be played in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy and renounces his membership of the Austrian Performing Rights Society. Mother dies

*Elgar dies* (1934); *Berg dies* (1935); *Israel PO founded by Huberman* (1936); *Gershwin dies* (1937); *Copland: Billy the Kid* (1938); *Strauss: Daphne* (1938)

### AMERICA AND THE FINAL PHASE (1940–1945)

US tour. Records *Contrasts* with Benny Goodman and Szigeti. Farewell concert in Budapest. Back to US for good. The last concertos. Dies of leukaemia, New York, September 26, 1945

*Jewish composers leave Europe for US* (1940–); *Prokofiev: War and Peace* (1943); *Bernstein: On the Town* (1944); *Britten: Peter Grimes* (1945); *Webern dies* (1945)

# THE GRAMOPHONE TEAM'S 2011 HIGHLIGHTS

We look back on our favourite musical moments of a stellar year



Le Freischütz at the Opéra-Comique



## JAMES JOLLY ▲

*Editor-in-Chief*

Paris's Opéra-Comique provided two of my finest musical experiences this year. Offenbach's sparkling (and rather, *avant la lettre*, G&Sish) *Les brigands*, under the musical direction of François-Xavier Roth was a riot (complete with copious on-stage fauna), but the stand-out performance was Weber's *Der Freischütz*, Frenchified by Berlioz (rather unimaginatively as *Le Freischütz*). So perfectly attuned was Berlioz to Weber's language that his recitatives wove in seamlessly and made you realise, given the juxtaposition, what

a huge debt Berlioz owed Weber. Sir John Eliot Gardiner presided in the pit, with his Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique on top form: how this music benefits from the rasp and bite of period instruments (and, given the opera's hunting theme, the natural horns brayed magnificently!). The singing was terrific, with Gidon Saks hair-raising as Gaspard (aka Kaspar). The Monteverdi Choir once again proved extremely adaptable to high drama and it was magnificently full-throated (Londoners got the chance of a semi-staged reprise at the Proms).

## MARTIN CULLINGFORD ▼

*Editor*

It's 80 years since Elgar, on November 12, 1931, officially opened Abbey Road studios by conducting 'Land of Hope and Glory': eight decades which have seen some of the most remarkable recordings committed to – variously – wax, tape or hard drive, all behind the unassuming facade of a Georgian townhouse in quiet London suburbia. It was wonderful to explore this heritage for a *Gramophone* cover story, a pleasure to talk to artists including Dame Janet Baker and Angela Gheorghiu about their memories and an absolute joy to spend so much time with the studio's behind-the-scenes masters – the sound engineers and producers past and present, the remastering experts. During my visits the remastering team were restoring EMI's Great Cathedral Organs series – 19 LPs issued in the late '60s – for new CD issue. I have just been given a set and it sounds marvellous: playing of past decades, instruments and architecture of past centuries, all given vivid new life by the hi-tech skills of today. What better encapsulates the great work done at Abbey Road?



Studio One at Abbey Road



## CHARLOTTE SMITH ▾

Staff Writer

Sometimes the best performances aren't the ones supported by high-concept ideas and fancy staging. My concert highlight this year was a stripped down, intimate affair, confident enough to allow the music to do the talking. I had travelled to Bonn for the annual Beethovenfest and was attending a performance by violinist Julian Rachlin and pianist Itamar Golan of Beethoven's Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Violin Sonatas. Of course, the experience of hearing Beethoven in the city – and indeed the house – of his birth would always lend the performance an air of novelty, but this was consummate playing in a circular, amphitheatre-style venue, designed to draw the best from chamber performances. Looking down on the musicians produced a feeling of genuine immediacy, without crowding. And the acoustic, worlds away from the resonance of a church, say, was perfect for the gutsy *Kreutzer*.

The only thing more impressive than Rachlin's violin playing was his ability to switch seamlessly from violin to viola in Richard Dubugnon's *Violiana*. Simply outstanding!

Julian Rachlin and Itamar Golan at the Beethovenfest in Bonn



The Royal Ballet in Kenneth MacMillan's Requiem at the Royal Opera House



## SARAH KIRKUP ▲

Deputy Editor

It's funny how some pieces demand no distractions, while others benefit from them. When I heard Leif Ove Andsnes play Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition* as part of Pictures Reframed two years ago, I had to shut my eyes to block out the sheer intrusiveness of Robin Rhodes's visual imagery.

But it was a different story at Covent Garden in October when, as part of a triple bill, the Royal Ballet performed Fauré's Requiem. I don't find the Requiem a weak piece when performed as it was intended, without dance. Its intimate chamber setting can be movingly beautiful, yet also strangely powerful. But Kenneth MacMillan's choreography brings a new dimension to the work. While the soloists and

chorus sing in the pit, the dancers weave intricate patterns on stage, complemented by simple, (mostly) androgynous costumes in multi-coloured hues. Dance can highlight a beautiful phrase, bringing deeper meaning to an already meaningful passage and there is no better example of this than the 'Pie Jesu', danced here with touching simplicity by Lauren Cuthbertson, a lone figure on stage mirroring the solo soprano in the pit.

The muscularity of the *Libera me* was translated to great effect on stage by Steven McRae, who was effortlessly lifted, thrown and carried by an all-male ensemble. And MacMillan's visual representation of the ascent to heaven in 'In Paradisum'? Perfection.

## JON BUTTERWORTH ▾

Art Editor

The time: 10.30am. The place: a sumptuous Parisian hotel suite. The event: the day I played virtuoso 'air piano' for one of the greatest living concert pianists.

On my way to photograph Lang Lang for the cover of the Proms issue I hadn't reckoned on the need to show him how to play the piano. But once at the shoot, and without a piano to be seen, the only option was to...improvise. I had only been allotted 15 minutes with the maestro to get a cover shot of him playing – difficult enough under normal circumstances but almost impossible without a piano!

With a deep breath and (metaphorically) crossed fingers I showed Lang Lang how to position his hands, weight his elbows and sculpt his digits over imaginary keys so that I could position a piano into the image later on whilst still making it look natural.

I've unwittingly let you into *Gramophone's* secret of the year – the shot that ended up on the cover was taken without a piano.



Cover shoot: Lang Lang plays the imaginary piano

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## ANDREW MELLOR ▸

Reviews Editor

My relationship with opera reached a pretty low ebb this year. A string of moribund productions convinced me that London had forgotten what really makes opera come alive. Then a bunch of unknown performers in a work I'd not heard proved that wrong – and put my love for the art form back on the ascendant.

It was Tchaikovsky's one-act *Iolanta* at the Guildhall School, in a production of rare concentration and loveliness. There's a naive but compelling genius to the score which seeped into the craft of the young performers. All were talented and capable – the chorus was the most

detailed and physically moving I've seen and the orchestra combined brilliance with patience – but at the same time they propelled a genuine sense of discovery. There they all were, hemmed in by Yannis Thavoris's strikingly claustrophobic but utterly beautiful set, giving it everything they could. As the narrative unfurled the atmosphere grew ever more tense and dramatic. I sat there not knowing how this keen little story was going to end, and when it did the effect was as surging and overwhelming as Tchaikovsky's final orchestral flourish. I rushed to the nearest pub for a short, strong drink.

Paul Curievici and Natalya Romaniw in Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta*

Johannes Martin Kränzle as Beckmesser with Gerald Finley's riveting Sachs at Glyndebourne



## ANTONY CRAIG ▴

Production Editor

My companion had never been to Wagner before and the prospect of six and three quarter hours, not to mention a 3pm start, she found daunting. She needn't have worried: Glyndebourne's first staging of *Die Meistersinger* was riveting from the opening note and we couldn't take our eyes off 1986 Glyndebourne chorus protégé Gerald Finley – the complete Hans Sachs, contemplative and, at times, almost a tortured soul. That he was vocally utterly assured goes almost without saying.

But this was no one man show: Vladimir Jurowski's Wagner is always thoughtful and the LPO opened the season in fine fettle. Johannes Martin Kränzle's Beckmesser was a worthy foil for Finley and Marco Jentsch and Topi

Lehtipuu were completely engaging as Walther and David. If Anna Gabler's Eva and Michaela Selinger's Magdalene didn't have quite the impact of their male counterparts it hardly detracted from the success of David McVicar's splendid production, with an orchestra of 80, 17 soloists, 80 choristers, a dozen dancers and actors and some 30 supernumeraries. The Glyndebourne stage has never been so busy – and to such purpose.

It was a glorious start to a season memorable also for both the Donna Elvira and the Governess (*Turn of the Screw*) of the exquisite Miah Persson and another joyous Glyndebourne turn (Adina in *L'elisir d'amore*) from the Lady of the Manor, Mrs Gus Christie (née Danielle de Niese).

## DAVID THREASHER ▾

Sub-Editor

Two contenders for spectacle of the year, with English National Opera's *Parsifal* – the greatest of all works of art in any medium – breathtaking at the Coliseum and luminously conducted by Mark Wigglesworth. But perhaps an even greater spectacle was the gathering together of two orchestras (with attendant brass-and-timpani bands), soloists and choirs from all the regions and nations, for Havergal Brian's mighty *Gothic* Symphony at the Proms. I'm glad I had an opportunity to experience this leviathan live but I'll remember it with mixed feelings. Certainly it gives one a greater appreciation of Mahler's Eighth – a minnow by comparison but indubitably the work of the greater genius. And it means, now that my generation has had 'our' *Gothic* at the Albert Hall (than which no other building can be better suited), that it now doesn't need to be resuscitated for another 30 years or so. In fact, I can honestly say that I've never enjoyed a second-rate piece of music so much.



Havergal Brian's magnum opus at the Proms

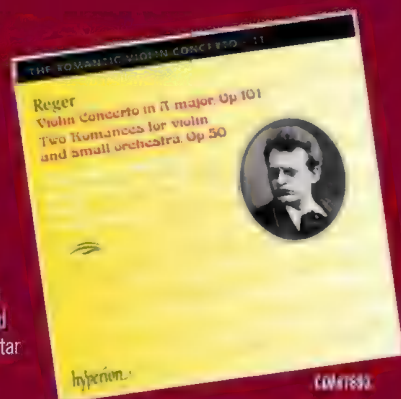


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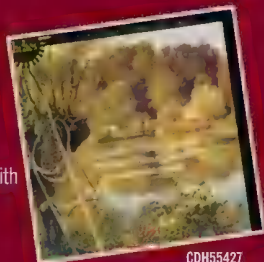
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# GRAMOPHONE *Reviews*

January 2012



John Wilson conducts Paul McCartney's ballet *Ocean's Kingdom* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 48**

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## GRAMOPHONE *Reviewers*



**Philip Clark**

Sometimes I envy my *Gramophone* colleagues who review, for the want of a better phrase, 'standard repertoire'. They don't need to expend precious words evaluating Beethoven's music; they can jump straight to the pertinent points of the performance.

But the music I review most – generally post-1945 American and European 'modernism' – often requires a detailed technical gauge of what I think the composer is trying to do, before I can decide how well the performers (if any: I review electronic music too) are meeting that challenge. Does assessing Cageian indeterminacy, or a work written in an unfamiliar idiom, require the same

approach as another Beethoven Fifth? I'd hope not. It's rare that I'm able, as Edward Seckerson did last year with a particular Mahler Second, to tell you 'this is the one'. The Cage of the late number pieces, or *Atlas ellipticalis*, remains forever open-ended; a premiere recording, good or bad, means you either like it or lump it.

Not that I'm complaining. In my other life playing improvised music and writing about jazz, free improvisation and rock, I regularly deal with music for which no direct reference point exists. And when you read a review of mine weighted more towards the music, that's why. If the music's no good, who cares about the performance?

Andrew Achenbach

Nalen Anthoni

Mike Ashman

**Philip Clark**

Rob Cowan\*

Justin Davidson

Jeremy Dibble

Peter Dickinson

Jed Distler

Duncan Druce

Adrian Edwards

Richard Fairman

David Fallows

David Fanning

Iain Fenlon

Fabrice Fitch

Jonathan

Freeman-Attwood

Edward Greenfield

David Gutman

Lindsay Kemp

Philip Kennicott

Tess Knighton

Andrew Lamb

Richard Lawrence

Ivan March

Ivan Moody

Bryce Morrison

Jeremy Nicholas

Christopher Nickol

Geoffrey Norris

Richard Osborne

Stephen Plaistow

Peter Quantrill

Guy Rickards

Malcolm Riley

Marc Rochester

Julie Anne Sadie

Edward Seckerson

Pwyl ap Siôn

Harriet Smith

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David Threasher

David Vickers

John Warrack

Richard Whitehouse

Arnold Whittall

Richard Wigmore

William Yeoman

\* Contributing Editor

# Recording of the Month



*'Liszt's songs demand operatic glamour. With her diamantine tone, dramatic flair and free-soaring top notes, Diana Damrau provides it in spades'*

*Richard Wigmore marvels at a new recording of a neglected area of Liszt's output*

## Liszt

Der Fischerknabe. Im Rhein, im schönen Strome. Die Lorelei. Die drei Zigeuner. Es war ein König in Thule. Ihr Glocken von Marling. Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh. Der du von dem Himmel bist. Benedetto sia 'l giorno. Pace non trovo. I' vidi in terra angelici costumi. Freudvoll und leidvoll (two versions). Vergiftet sind meine Lieder. Es rauschen die Winde. Die stille Wasserrose. Bist du! Es muss ein Wunderbares sein. O Lieb, so lang du lieben kannst  
**Diana Damrau** sop **Helmuth Deutsch** pf  
Virgin Classics © 070928-2 (77) • DDD • T/t

Towards the end of his life, Liszt ruefully dubbed his eclectic output for voice and piano – Lieder, mélodies, plus settings in Italian, Hungarian, Russian and even English – ‘My orphaned songs’. Today a dozen or so crop up regularly in recitals and on disc, notably the epigrammatic ‘Es muss ein Wunderbares sein’ and the three Petrarch sonnets (sung here in their earliest versions), where Chopin and Bellini are refracted through a Lisztian prism. These favourites aside, Liszt’s songs still tend to inhabit the margins. Although he could produce a tune as luscious as ‘O Lieb, so lang du lieben kannst’ (more famous as the keyboard solo ‘Liebestraum’), he was not one of the Romantic generation’s most natural

melodists. Yet, as Diana Damrau’s superb recital reveals, his Lieder abound in novel keyboard textures, evocative word-setting and audacious harmonies, lushly sensuous in the early songs, increasingly astringent and enigmatic as he grew older.

In the songs from the early 1840s, when the keyboard lion roved Europe to hysterical adulation, the showman could sometimes overwhelm the poet, as Liszt himself acknowledged a decade later: ‘My early songs are mostly too sentimentally inflated and often overlaid in the accompaniment.’ To prove his point he revised and rewrote, usually in the direction of concentration: thus the earlier setting of Schiller’s ballad ‘Der Fischerknabe’, with its flashy vocal line and cascades of wrist-breaking arpeggios, was superseded by the more restrained and subtle setting recorded here.

Even in their chaster revised versions, many of these songs – say, ‘Im Rhein’, famously set by Schumann in *Dichterliebe* – have an operatic expansiveness. In Liszt’s hands ‘Die Lorelei’ becomes an elaborate dramatic monologue, while in the smokily atmospheric ‘Die drei Zigeuner’, declamatory recitative alternates with pungent snatches of Hungarian rhapsody. Yet several of the most memorable songs here

are models of economy: the whirlwind early setting of ‘Freudvoll und leidvoll’ (Klärchen’s song from Goethe’s *Egmont*), ‘Vergiftet sind meine Lieder’, whose harmonic shocks are the perfect musical equivalent of Heine’s melodramatic *Weltschmerz*, or the almost impressionistic ‘Ihr Glocken von Marling’, where bell chimes dissolve into iridescent sequences of pulsing chords.

So many of Liszt’s songs were conceived for professional opera singers and demand a corresponding operatic glamour in performance. With her diamantine tone, dramatic flair and free-soaring top notes, Diana Damrau provides this in spades, whether in the fervent climaxes of ‘Der du von dem Himmel bist’ (at the polar extreme from Schubert’s setting of the same Goethe poem), or the mounting excitement of the love song ‘Bist du’. Here and elsewhere, the poise and purity of her sustained high notes are a priceless asset. She also excels in intimacy, singing ‘Es muss ein Wunderbares sein’ with unsentimental tenderness (and avoiding the trap of dragging), and spinning a line of silken delicacy in the secretive ‘Die stille Wasserrose’, a little-known gem. Elsewhere Damrau perfectly catches Klärchen’s ecstatic agitation in the first version of ‘Freudvoll und leidvoll’





Diana Damrau: a born stage animal and story-teller



Later Liszt: the composer in Rome in 1865

and her blissful languor in the contrasting later setting (uniquely, later here means more expansive); and she brings an almost hysterical – and very Heine-esque – scorn, even outrage, to ‘Vergiftet sind meine Lieder’.

A born stage animal and story-teller, Damrau is equally in her element in Liszt’s more flamboyant and dramatic songs. She times and colours ‘Die drei Zigeuner’ to perfection: in the melancholy mystery of the opening, where she veils her naturally bright timbre, the swagger of the csárdás melody, the dream-like indolence of the sleeper and the sneering bitterness she brings to the final ‘dreimal verachtet’. A word here, too, for the ever-observant Helmut Deutsch, a vivid colourist and scene-painter who shows plenty of Lisztian temperament in

his gypsy band evocations. (Incidentally, the booklet text robs the song of its final verse.)

Damrau’s mastery of a supple *bel canto* line is eloquently displayed in ‘Der Fischerknabe’ (where she infuses the siren calls with insinuating sweetness) and ‘Im Rhein’, sung with delicate sensuality and, as ever, an acute awareness of harmonic colour – say, the tenderly softened tone in response to the remote modulation at ‘freundlich hinein gestrahlt’. In the Petrarch sonnets Damrau can sometimes dramatise individual words at the expense of a liquid Italianate *legato*, as in the limpid opening of ‘I vidi in terra angelici costumi’. But she lives each of these songs intensely, her singing by turns fiery, exalted and rapt. How much, too, this music gains from Damrau’s graceful preparation and perfect placement of top notes (the soft high G sharp and subsequent descent at the beatific close of ‘Benedetto sia l’ giorno’ is especially lovely), and from her and Deutsch’s precise observation of Liszt’s dynamic markings, including his many gradations of *pp*, *ppp* and *pppp*. Beautifully recorded, and with an excellent, informative note by Andrew Huth, Damrau’s project should win Liszt’s still underrated songs many new friends, not least for her exquisite floating delicacy in ‘Ihr Glocken von Marling’.

## Listening points

Your guide to the disc’s memorable moments

### ‘Im Rhein’: Track 2, 1’16”

Underpinned by Deutsch’s gossamer semiquavers – the beating of angels’ wings – Damrau perfectly catches the delicate erotic complicity of the final verse, so different from Schumann’s rapt setting.

and impressionistic subtlety. Damrau sings with a rapt, wondering simplicity, abetted by Deutsch’s weightless accompaniment.

### ‘Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh’: Track 7, start

Singer and pianist perfectly catch the numinous tranquillity of this Goethe setting, so different from Schubert’s sublime miniature, yet here hardly less moving.

### ‘Pace non trovo’: Track 10, 4’01”

Damrau’s operatic flair comes into its own in the three Petrarch sonnets. She savours to the full the masochistic ecstasy of the climax of ‘Pace non trovo’, with baleful chest tones at ‘mi spiacce morte e vita’ – ‘death and life alike repel me’.

### ‘Die drel Zigeuner’: Track 4, 4’20”

This song shows Damrau as the most vivid of narrators. After the proud csárdás tune, the three life options presented by the gypsies – to smoke, sleep or play the fiddle – are graphically characterised. The ending has a kind of awed eeriness.

### ‘Ihr Glocken von Marling’: Track 6, start

This song is quintessential late Liszt in its blend of austere restraint



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# Orchestral



**Harriet Smith reviews Howard Shelley's Beethoven piano concertos**

*'Quiet musicality and unobtrusive virtuosity shine through everything he touches'*

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 43**



**Bryce Morrison reviews Stephen Hough's Grieg and Liszt**

*'He can soar, inflect and alter the course of a musical argument at the drop of a hat'*

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 46**

## CPE Bach • Telemann

**CPE Bach** Cello Concerto, H436 Wq171<sup>a</sup>

**Telemann** Musique de table, 'Tafelmusik' -

Overture in B flat

<sup>a</sup>Irene Güdel vc

**Hamburg Radio Orchestra / Carlos Kleiber**

Profil ⑤ PH11031 (44' • ADD)

Includes interview with Carlos Kleiber

Recorded 1960



**An early Kleiber performance and in unexpected repertoire**

On December 7, 1960, a repetiteur-turned-conductor who had only recently started to use the family name gave his first high-profile orchestral concert as part of Norddeutscher Rundfunk's 'Podium der Jungen' series, a strand featuring the station's second orchestra, more usually assigned to light classics. The programme was eclectic: a Telemann suite and a CPE Bach concerto followed by Martinů's Oboe Concerto (a showcase for the 21-year-old Heinz Holliger) and three dances from Falla's *The Three-Cornered Hat*. A few days before the concert, the Telemann work was also set down in studio conditions and the cosmopolitan maestro persuaded to do a short interview in his lightly accented German. Unfortunately it is only the last two items plus a less-than-pristine off-air capture of the CPE Bach that would seem to have survived. And, in truth, were the young man anyone other than Carlos Kleiber, it is scarcely likely that the tapes would have been disinterred 51 years later.

To be fair, whether Carlos's Telemann anticipates contemporary performance practice in Baroque music or merely echoes the resilient manner of his formidable conductor-father, Erich, this is, in the circumstances, a distinguished effort, tight, springy and never texturally overstuffed. Its companion, one of the few surviving recorded examples of Kleiber *filis* directing a concerto, is less well played and has the heavier inflections to be expected of its period.

Sadly Profil's accompanying booklet will disappoint non-German-speaking fans. While there is a useful note by Alexander Werner,

whose full biography of the conductor has not yet been published in English, Kleiber's interval feature remains inexplicably untranslated. One for the diehards – and short measure too! **David Gutman**

## JS Bach

**Four Orchestral Suites, BWV1066-69**

**Freiburg Baroque Orchestra / Gottfried von der Goltz**

Harmonia Mundi ⑤ ② HMC90 2113/14 (94' • DDD)

## JS Bach

**'Sinfonia'**

Sinfonias and Concertos from Cantatas Nos 12, 18, 21, 29, 31, 35, 42, 52, 75, 142, 146, 150, 152, 156, 169, 174, 182 & 196

**Accademia Bizantina / Ottavio Dantone**

Decca ⑤ 478 2718DH (73' • DDD)



**Orchestral Bach from Freiburg and Ravenna**

It's hard to imagine an eminent Baroque ensemble more temperamentally suited to the *esprit* of Bach's four orchestral essays than the Freiburgers. Taking chronology as opposed to traditional numbering as the rationale for starting with the Fourth Suite, elegance immediately defines the rhythmic identity of the playing; the unforced gestural landscape is governed equally by instinct and experience – remaining undimmed towards the last exultant strains of the Gigue of the other, more famous, D major Suite (No 3).

Quibble, as one might, with the inconsistent internal tuning of the winds, there is something enchantingly episodic and genial about the *alternativements* dances in all four works. In the best sense, some of the movements are almost businesslike with the essence of the music truly ingrained, as for example the way the string fanfares of the middle section of the Gavotte of the C major Suite simply flourish. In the less diverting moments, such as the Passepièdes of the same work, one wishes for an embrace, not just steady handshakes.

It is, however, the objective dignity afforded to the more extrovert dances,

alongside the studied intimacy of the B minor Suite (No 2) which produces the variety and range of characterisation evident in the best recorded sets (of which Koopman's DHM reading from 1989 still takes some beating). Not without fantasy and playfulness – indeed the opening *Allegro* rushes – one rarely hears the B minor performed with such a keen ear for the timbral possibilities between flute and strings, although some will find the intonation between flute and cello a little too gamy for comfort.

As for the ubiquitous Air of the Third Suite, it is presented here as a distant shadow in a gleaming starlit night, a touch disarming at first and then quite mesmerising. That, perhaps, sums up much of this fresh but reassuringly familiar landscape, one which joins Koopman and the early Pinnock performances at the top.

Rather less enticing, though no less brilliantly executed, is the recital of cantata sinfonias from Ottavio Dantone. Only occasionally does such a diverse anthology serve the music well (I recall Helmut Winschermann doing so effectively in the early 1970s), since these often conceit-ridden pieces – concerto movements aside – are designed to prepare the way for sung revelation, not as stand-alone pieces cheek-by-jowl with contrasting instrumental works.

A survey of such preambles is further undone by the superficiality of the performances, notably with incessant ornamentation rather than tear-away speeds (as can be the case with Italian Baroque groups). BWV29 ends with an inexplicably curious figure in the organ after the final chord (or is it an editing mistake?), and BWV156 comprises excess embellishment which renders Bach's original contour almost undecipherable. The fast concerto movements, mainly with organ obbligato, are confidently delivered by Dantone, if unyieldingly pointillist in articulation. Overall, this is a collection of brilliant thrills but ultimately less than gratifying Bach-playing. **Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

*Suites – selected comparisons:*

*English Concert, Pinnock (10/88) (ARCH) 423 492-2.AX3*

*Amsterdam Baroque Orch, Koopman (1/90) (DHM) RD77864*





Leading from the front: Howard Shelley with the Orchestra of Opera North

## Beethoven

'Complete Works for Piano and Orchestra'

Piano Concertos – Nos 1-5; Op 61 (arr from Violin Concerto); WoO4 (orch Shelley). Rondo, WoO6. Triple Concerto, Op 56<sup>3</sup>. Choral Fantasia, Op 80<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Tasmin Little <sup>vn</sup> <sup>a</sup>Tim Hugh <sup>vc</sup> Orchestra and

<sup>b</sup>Chorus of Opera North / Howard Shelley <sup>pf</sup>

Chandos ® ④ CHAN10695 (5h 16' • DDD • T/T)

Includes 'Beethoven and Mozart: An Obsession?', a talk by Howard Shelley



**Shelley directs Beethoven's complete piano-orchestral works**

Unlike a certain Italian maestro's Beethoven symphony cycle (Decca, A/11), this new set of concertos has appeared with relatively little fanfare. And yet there are several reasons to shout about it. One is that, besides the usual five concertos, there's the *Choral Fantasia*, the Triple, the purported original finale for the B flat Concerto and Howard Shelley's own reconstruction of the early E flat Piano Concerto, which is receiving its first recording. And then there's Shelley himself: a pianist whose quiet musicality and unobtrusive virtuosity shine through everything he touches. He directs the Orchestra of Opera North from the keyboard, which must have been quite a feat in the *Choral Fantasia*, with its additional forces and unorthodox structure. This is one of the set's

greatest successes, with Shelley finding more flexibility in the extraordinary solo part than Aimard, and judging the choral contribution just right so that they never become overbearing. Throughout the set, there's a humanity to Shelley's music-making; it's particularly affecting in the B flat Concerto, which he imbues with warmth as well as wit, qualities also to be found in the readings of Richard Goode and Paul Lewis.

The early E flat Concerto was probably written when Beethoven was 13, and all that we have of it is the keyboard part (extraordinarily for 'harpsichord or fortepiano', though unimaginable on the former) plus a few indications of orchestration. Shelley has taken a sensitive approach to reconstructing the orchestral writing, erring on the side of reticence (though the flautist has quite a time of it). What's striking is how Beethovenian the piece sounds – and what a formidable pianist he must have been even by this stage! If hardly an undiscovered masterpiece, it is a fascinating stepping-stone to the mature concertos.

Shelley is fascinated by the link between the C minor concertos of Mozart and Beethoven, arguing in an illustrated talk that in the Third Concerto Beethoven is engaged in a 'heated discussion' with Mozart. Certainly, Shelley's reading of the Third seems to engage with both past and future,

and it's one of the best things here, with a crisp energy to the solo line but also marvellous moments of reflection, such as the passage towards the end of the first movement where the timpani enters following the piano's cadenza. And the slow movement balances Classical poise with a judicious delicacy of coloration.

The benefits of directing from the keyboard are evident both in the intimacy and the immediacy of Shelley's approach; this works particularly potently in No 4, which is very fine (though I wouldn't relinquish either Gilels or Edwin Fischer, the latter also directing from the keyboard). There's gentleness but also steel to Shelley's approach, the drama arising from the notes themselves; he has, in the first oboe, a characterful duetting partner. Lewis is also immensely telling here, especially in the drama of opposites that unfolds during the slow movement, where the BBC Symphony Orchestra sounds altogether mightier than Shelley's forces. Cellist Tim Hugh shines in the Triple, though I'm less keen on Tasmin Little's tone; in this work, Thomas Zehetmair, Clemens Hagen and Pierre-Laurent Aimard are a compelling threesome.

The outer movements of the Fifth Concerto are perhaps the only places where I have reservations about Shelley's approach. A work of such grandly outspoken sentiments surely needs outspoken piano-

playing. It's hard to dismiss the iron-clad certainty of Gilels in the opening peroration (or the thwump of the *pizzicato* cellos and basses at the start of the slow movement before the Russian's majestically serene entry) and I have similar reservations about the otherwise exceptional Perahia cycle. Shelley's forces are lighter, more chamber-musical than either, and his entry in the slow movement has an appealingly intimate feel to it, though it doesn't quite measure up to Perahia's rapt beauty.

But, taken as a whole, this is a major new cycle, an important addition not only to the catalogue but also to Shelley's exceptionally fine discography. **Harriet Smith**

*Pf Concs Nos 1-5 – selected comparisons:*

*Perahia; RCO, Haitink (10/07) (SONY) 88697 10290-2*

*Lewis; BBC SO, Bělohlávek (9/10) (HARM) HMC90 2053/5*

*Goode; Budapest Fest Orch, I Fischer (NONE) 7559 79928-3*

*Choral Fantasy, Triple Conc, Rondo – selected comparison:*

*Aimard; COE, Harnoncourt (11/04) (WARN) 2564 60602-2*

*Pf Concs Nos 3 & 4 – selected comparison:*

*E Fischer; Philb Orch (2/55\*, 2/56\*) (TEST) SBT1169*

*Pf Concs Nos 4 & 5 – selected comparison:*

*Gilels; Philb Orch, Ludwig (4/97) (TEST) SBT1095*

## Brahms

Variations on a Theme by Haydn, 'St Antoni Chorale', Op 56a. Serenade No 1, Op 11.

Hungarian Dances, WoO1 – Nos 1, 3 & 10

**Bamberg Symphony Orchestra / Robin Ticciati**

Tudor (P) TUDOR7183 (68' • DDD/DSO)



### A young conductor tackles the young Brahms's Serenade

The pleasure this disc affords rests in part in the programme it provides. Brahms's *Haydn* Variations and youthful six-movement Serenade must rank high on any list of music's most agreeable works. The opening of the Serenade, with its al fresco country mood and lyric second subject whose headily beautiful exfoliations Schubert or Dvořák would have been proud to pen, is a particular joy. A lesser composer might have been tempted to prune the piece and pass it off as a symphony but the 26-year-old Brahms knew that symphonies are made of sterner stuff. Less intermittently troubled than the Second Symphony, which it occasionally anticipates, the Serenade is the symphony's deeply contented country cousin.

It is the perfect work for a young conductor to record. Robin Ticciati, who is roughly the same age as Brahms when he completed the Serenade, barely puts a foot wrong. The opening movement is realised with élan and expressive beauty, the movement with two minuets is deliciously pointed and sprung, and the *Adagio non troppo* is exactly that: expressive but not (as is sometimes the case) overindulged.

I shall not be throwing out István Kertész's superb LSO recording (Decca, 5/68 – nla) or Claudio Abbado's more recent account with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra. That said, Ticciati and his reliable and reliably recorded Bamberg players have nothing to fear from comparison with Kurt Masur's lugubrious Leipzig version. I didn't greatly care for Ticciati's bullish way with the three *Hungarian Dances*; no performance can succeed if the playing itself loses balance and shape. Happily that is rarely the case with the performances of the Serenade or Variations, both of which give more or less unalloyed pleasure. **Richard Osborne**

*Serenade – selected comparisons:*

*Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch, Masur*

*(1/82\*) (PENT) PTC5186 188*

*Mabler CO, Abbado (7/07) (DG) 476 5786GH*

## Brahms

Piano Concerto No 1<sup>st</sup>. Intermezzo, Op 119 No 1

**Hardy Rittner pf**

<sup>3</sup>L'Arte del Mondo / Werner Erhardt

Dabringhaus und Grimm (P) MDG904 1699-6

(51' • DDD/DSO)

Recorded live at the Bayer Kulturhaus, Leverkusen,

February 2011

## Brahms

Piano Concerto No 1

**Maurizio Pollini pf**

Staatskapelle Dresden / Christian Thielemann

DG (P) 477 9882GH (46' • DDD)

Recorded live, June 2011



### Two new live recordings offer opposing views of Brahms's turbulent concerto

Maurizio Pollini is a sovereign interpreter of this concerto – which he has recorded for DG twice before – but this time around I found myself taking more pleasure, rather to my surprise, in the pioneering venture on period instruments. In spirit, there's nothing antiquarian about it: the very well-prepared performance invites approval for the way it meets the challenge of great music on Brahms's terms, not for its exactitude as a historically conscious exercise. The wind in chorus are in tune; the natural horn, often an inspiration to Brahms, speaks as its own man and not as a forerunner of the modern descendant; and the orchestra in sections as well as a mass communicates discipline and confidence, and no feeling at all of being out to prove something. As to the piano, it proves to be a fine choice, allaying any doubt as soon as the octave trills begin that it might not last the course without the legs coming off. Érards were acknowledged to be superior to others when it came to clarity and brilliance,

and holding their own in interaction with an orchestra, and Brahms knew one in Hamburg at the time he was wrestling with 'my failed symphony' that he called 'the only usable grand piano here'. This example has its limitations: as you might expect, it can't sustain a singing line in the treble very well, let alone the intensity of feeling and vision of distant regions that the slow movement enshrines, unfolding at rather an amble here as if to attempt anything slower would be a problem. But the finale, from everybody, comes together astonishingly well, better I would say than from Pollini and Thielemann. I want to hear more of Hardy Rittner, an exceptional talent. The orchestra I would put on a par with Gardiner's (in the Schumann symphonies, for example) or any ensemble active in this type of business.

Dabringhaus und Grimm makes adventurous records. Here is one. If you're open to notions of 'historical' orchestral sound and to pianos in evolution when they were less standardised than today's, do try it.

Pollini's Dresden recording derives likewise from concert performances. He is quite far back in the picture. Thielemann flings the first theme of the *Maestoso* across the canvas as if to set the piece ablaze; in the very first bar the timpani roll blots out the rest of the scoring, but conductors will tell you that's Brahms's fault, a result of his inexperience. Pollini (as previously with Böhm and Abbado) has shown that the first movement can wear a truthful aspect without being slow, but here the pace is so hot that he modifies it, with a quantitative easing, at his first entry. I've never felt happy when soloists do this because Brahms's handover – as if to say, here you are, now you assume the continuity – is such a special moment and is predicated, surely, on a continuation 'in' time rather than 'outside' it. Why am I banging on about this detail? Because it exemplifies a failure of collaboration. It may be a small one but in this concerto, of all concertos, any reading which is not truly collaborative is going to fall short – conductor and soloist striking a spark off each other is only the start of it. Pollini continues with authority intact but part of the momentum Thielemann generated at the start has run into the sand. And I'd have liked more detailing of character. If your taste in the first movement is for an exploration in depth of a variegated romantic discourse, you may agree; and I particularly liked the performers on the other disc for showing that the finale can be light on its feet as well as fiery and exciting. With both versions I noted a habit common today to accompany any decrease in intensity of sound or harmonic movement with a slowing. Am I alone in finding lots of those otiose? You don't play Brahms as if you've swallowed a metronome,



of course not, but to compose the effect of a slowing into the music, when he wanted one, is one of his fingerprints. Thought for the day: the composer knew best – keep going when no slowing is indicated. **Stephen Plaistow**

*Pf Conc No 1 – selected comparisons:*

Pollini, VPO, Böhm (8/87) (DG) 419 470-2GGA2

Pollini, BPO, Abbado (4/99\*) (DG) 457 837-2GH2

## Debussy

'Orchestral Works, Vol 7'

Fantaisie<sup>a</sup>. Première Rapsodie<sup>b</sup>. Rapsodie (orch Roger-Ducasse)<sup>c</sup>. Danse sacrée et Danse profane<sup>d</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Paul Meyer *cl* <sup>c</sup>Alexandre Doisy *sax*

<sup>a</sup>Jean-Yves Thibaudet *pf* <sup>d</sup>Emmanuel Ceysson *hp*

Lyon National Orchestra / Jun Märkl

Naxos © 8 572675 (51' • DDD)



### Thibaudet and the Fantaisie in Lyon's seventh Debussy disc

For my money, there is every good reason for Debussy's *Fantaisie* for piano and orchestra to establish more of a toehold on today's repertoire, whether recorded or live, but this new disc triggers a dilemma. On the one hand, it is part of Naxos's valuable continuing series of Debussy's orchestral music, coupling the *Fantaisie* with three other works for solo instrument and orchestra, the *Première Rapsodie* for clarinet, another *Rapsodie* that Debussy wrote with wan dilatoriness for saxophone, and the *Danse sacrée et Danse profane* for harp and strings. On that count, there is virtue in the disc's programme, with a lovely, supple performance of the clarinet *Rapsodie* from Paul Meyer, fully equal to the technical and expressive demands that Debussy enshrined in a piece written as a Paris Conservatoire competition test. Alexandre Doisy plays with a nice mix of spice and smoothness in the saxophone *Rapsodie*, and the wonderful Emmanuel Ceysson brings both enchantment and spirit to the two harp *Danses*.

The trouble with the performance of the piano-and-orchestra *Fantaisie* is that it does not really measure up to the one by Jean-Efflam Bavouzet and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, reviewed here last year and recently given a richly deserved *Gramophone* Award. Bavouzet places the *Fantaisie* together with the two Ravel concertos, so the reasons to buy are perhaps different, but Jean-Yves Thibaudet's fluid playing lacks Bavouzet's finesse and the Orchestre National de Lyon, while polished, is not a match for the BBC SO's scintillating detail. **Geoffrey Norris**

*Fantaisie – selected comparison:*

Bavouzet, BBC SO, Tortelier (12/10) (CHAN) CHSA5084

## Dvořák

Symphony No 9, 'From the New World'.

Czech Suite, Op 39 B93. Slavonic Dances –

Op 46 No 1; Op 72 No 2

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra / José Serebrier

Warner Classics © 2564 66656-3 (75' • DDD)



### Serebrier launches his Dvořák symphony cycle from the top

New major CD symphony cycles are always good news, especially when they hail from a conductor as experienced and as imaginative as José Serebrier. In a note appended to this first instalment of his Dvořák cycle, Serebrier confesses that he still approaches the *New World* Symphony with wonderment...and, I would add, 'with warmth', because that for me is the performance's principal quality. A certain freedom of approach too, such as we encounter at 3'13" into the first movement, just beyond the arrival of the second subject, where Serebrier eases the pace in preparation for the next thematic stop, so that the 'right' tempo is already in place. The middle movements also work well, the *Scherzo* maybe marginally faster than was comfortable for the orchestra, but the high point of the performance is the finale, which Serebrier gauges virtually to perfection, tracing every episode with the utmost care and yet always relating it to a wider musical context, though I could have done with a little more 'oomph' from the horns at around 1'20". Elsewhere, individual instrumental detail makes a happy though never conspicuous impression and one leaves the symphony satisfied that its profound message has been wholesomely conveyed. As to 'cyclic' rivals, Rowicki and Kubelík (both analogue) are hard acts to follow but in the digital field Serebrier has made a pretty good start.

The lilting, lyrically inclined *Czech Suite* is again affectionately played, with comfortably blended textures and never a hint of pushing too hard in the faster movements. The programme opens and closes with the most famous *Slavonic Dances*, the Op 46 No 1 not quite in the Kubelík or Šejna class but still full of beans, the Op 72 No 2, a true *Allegretto grazioso*, expressive but without the least hint of sentimentality. So, all in all, a pleasing and auspicious start to what I hope will prove a recommendable new cycle. We could certainly do with one. **Rob Cowan**

*Symphony – selected comparisons:*

LSO, Rowicki (1/70\*) (DECC) 478 2296DB6

BPO, Kubelík (10/73\*) (DG) 463 158-2GB6

*Slavonic Dances – selected comparisons:*

Bavarian Rad SO, Kubelík (11/75\*) (DG) 457 712-2GOR

Czech PO, Šejna (4/72\*) (SUPR) SU1916-2

## Falla

Noches en los jardines de España<sup>a</sup>. Cuatro piezas españolas. Fantasia Baetica. Homenaje. Pour le tombeau de Paul Dukas. Canción. Nocturno.

Mazurka. Serenata andaluzá

Javier Perianes *pf*

<sup>a</sup>BBC Symphony Orchestra / Josep Pons

Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2099 (80' • DDD)

<sup>a</sup>Recorded live at the Barbican Centre, London, January 2011



### Javier Perianes offers a taste of his native Spain

This is a disc to lift the spirits. Whether the music is sultry, strenuous or sunny, Javier Perianes plays with an infallible ear for style, atmosphere and colour. Most of the works here testify to their composer's nationality, harnessing as they do distinctive Spanish inflections of rhythm and melodic shaping, but there are exceptions. An early *Nocturno* and *Mazurka* from the 1890s show that, as with Falla's Russian contemporary Scriabin, the influence of Chopin was still making itself felt half a century after his death. A *Canción* from 1900 has the languid air of a Chopin nocturne beautifully crafted above a hypnotic bass-line reminiscent of a Satie *Gymnopédie*. A much later piece, the solemn and harmonically piquant *Pour le tombeau de Paul Dukas* of 1935, is more difficult to place, although the textures and timbres seem to have their origins in the French music with which Falla became familiar during his sojourn in Paris during the years before the First World War.

Surprisingly enough, given that he was such a remarkable pianist, Falla wrote comparatively little for his own instrument. Most of it – but not quite all – is recorded here, with the *Cuatro piezas españolas* showing how vibrantly and sensitively he could summon up the sensuality and exuberance of Spanish musical traits. The *Fantasia Baetica*, written for Arthur Rubinstein, does so with particular force, and in the *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* the BBC Symphony Orchestra joins Perianes for a performance of panache and captivating flair and freshness.

**Geoffrey Norris**

## Hillborg

Dreaming River<sup>a</sup>. Eleven Gates<sup>a</sup>.

Exquisite Corpse<sup>b</sup>. King Tide<sup>c</sup>

Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra /

<sup>b</sup>Alan Gilbert, <sup>c</sup>Sakari Oramo, <sup>a</sup>Esa-Pekka Salonen

BIS © BIS-SACD1406 (67' • DDD/DSD)



### Exploring the orchestral mastery of Anders Hillborg

With each passing year, Anders Hillborg's international reputation grows apace. Listeners in the UK may recall a series of high-profile premieres at the Proms in recent years: *Liquid Marble* (11/03), *Exquisite Corpse* (included here), *Peacock Tales* and – last summer – *Cold Heat*, the first Swedish work premiered by the Berlin Philharmonic. Audiences in California will recognise *Eleven*

*Gates*, premiered in 2006 in the Walt Disney Concert Hall, where Hillborg's newest orchestral piece, *Sirens*, was premiered last November. The present collection showcases Hillborg's typically multifaceted and wickedly good-natured humour, most obviously in *Eleven Gates*, an integrated yet surreal suite describing an imaginary journey from D major through rooms or seascapes with chattering, floating or whispering mirrors, encountering woodpeckers, toy pianos, a string quartet and elastic seabirds, descending from a 'Meadow of Sadsongs' to the sea floor.

Hillborg's penchant for seemingly whimsical titles, usually chosen after most, if not all, of the composition is complete, is nowhere more appropriate than in *Exquisite Corpse* (2002), a musical homage to the Surrealists' famous parlour game and in which Hillborg imagined what kind of work sympathetic friends might construct from his own music by a similar process. *King Tide* (1999), by contrast, is a reimagining of his celebrated phonetic motet, *Muoaeuyaeum* (1983-86), the chattering, New Simplicity pulsation of which – framed by calmer, sustained sections – translates splendidly to the orchestra. *Dreaming River* (1998) is different again, perhaps the most volatile and explosive work here, its starting point the shawm-like sound of the Chinese oboe, the *suona* (Hillborg deploys two).

The Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra is on splendid form throughout, led by conductors who have championed these works at home and abroad. BIS's SACD sound is typically spectacular, making this release very strongly recommended.

**Guy Rickards**

## Liszt

'The Sound of Weimar, Vol 2'

Les préludes. Orpheus.

Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne

**Vienna Academy Orchestra / Martin Haselböck**

NCA 60246 (57' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Liszt Festival, Raiding, Austria, January 2011

## Liszt

'The Sound of Weimar, Vol 3'

Hungaria. Hunnenschlacht. Mazeppa

**Vienna Academy Orchestra / Martin Haselböck**

NCA 60250 (58' • DDD)



**Haselböck's period instrument  
Liszt project continues**

The second instalment of Martin Haselböck's Liszt series moves the cursor across three contrasting tone-poems, *Les préludes* in particular emerging with sound perspectives

that are quite unlike the norm. The booklet-note makes the interesting point that as originally conceived the work may not have had anything to do with 'the series of preludes to...death' (Lammartine) that have for so long been credited as Liszt's prompting inspiration. The most drastic scenario is that the literary programme was added later, but never mind, it's as well that we think again because as performed on these period instruments the music may well suggest an altogether different narrative sequence. The upper string lines are softer than usual, the lower ones often more prominent, while the woodwinds have an appealingly plangent quality and the brass cut a strong but warm profile. How nice too that the harp is so well focused (ditto in *Orpheus*) and the percussion battery at the close is so thrillingly but naturally realistic (a result of having the other instruments sound with a softer grain).

*Orpheus*, the loveliest of the tone-poems, is played with the greatest purity but what most struck me about Haselböck's interpretation was its acknowledgement of the music's deep-rooted ambiguity, which is most striking in the quietly shuddering aftermath of the resplendent central climax, from around 7'15". The conflict of heroic affirmation (ie nature) and human fallibility that sits at the heart of the Victor Hugo-inspired *Mountain Symphony* was the launch pad for the whole series of tone-poems. Haselböck and his players do well by the music's inherent drama (try from around 19'41") though not even they quite manage to maintain the tension for a full 30 minutes.

Vol 3 of the series is in some respects the best so far, principally on account of Haselböck's compelling performance of the rarely heard *Hungaria*, a homage to the Hungarian fatherland where local rhythms and inflections are tellingly underlined, and *Hunnenschlacht*, which so often sounds like a corny, 'spiked helmet' musical caricature but that Haselböck paces with canny judgement, never rushing fences but allowing the mighty cataclysm at the work's centre – where proudly triumphant forces draw to a sudden halt and allow for a quiet chorale played on the organ – to make its full effect. Only *Mazeppa* disappoints, at least at the beginning. 'The work begins with whip cracks that goad Mazeppa's horse into the Steppe accompanied only by menacing birds of prey', writes Gerhard Winkler in the excellent booklet-note. Well, that's not quite how things sound here, the performance as a whole falling short of the vivid narrative achieved by the likes of Karajan, Masur and Haitink, though as ever with this series there is a pay-off in terms of the instruments used (and detailed in the booklet) and the way they help revise our ideas on how the music

should, or might, sound. Just be prepared for a mellower, less 'macho' aural experience than others achieve with their modern instruments in the same repertoire.

As to those specific rivals, the crude, endearingly reckless Nikolai Golovanov (selections are, or were, on EMI's 'Great Conductors of the 20th Century' and Dante Lys) pushes drama and intensity to their limits, but most readers would find the lacerating Russian mono sound so uncomfortable that any recommendation would need to come with a supply of protective earmuffs. Noseda, Masur and Haitink (the latter without the *Dante* and *Faust* symphonies) remain secure recommendations on the modern-instrument front but Haselböck's liberated textures open up new listening horizons that all lovers of this fine but still underrated music should investigate. I anticipate more revelations further along the way. **Rob Cowan**

*Sym Poems – selected comparison:*

Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch, Masur (EMI) 085160-2

LPO, Haitink (DECC) 478 2309DB4

*Préludes, Orpheus, Mountain Sym – selected comparison:*

BBC PO, Noseda (10/05) (CHAN) CHAN10341

*Hungaria, Hunnenschlacht – selected comparison:*

BBC PO, Noseda (1/09) (CHAN) CHAN10490

*Mazeppa – selected comparison:*

BBC PO, Noseda (7/07) (CHAN) CHAN10417

## Liszt

Piano Concertos<sup>a</sup> – No 1, S124; No 2, S125.

Consolation, S172 No 3. Valse oubliée, S215 No 1

**Daniel Barenboim** *pf*

<sup>a</sup>Staatskapelle Berlin / Pierre Boulez

DG 477 9521GH (50' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Klavier-Festival Ruhr, Alfred Krupp Saal, Philharmonie, Essen, June 2011

## Grieg • Liszt

**Grieg Piano Concerto**

**Liszt Piano Concertos** – No 1, S124; No 2, S125

**Stephen Hough** *pf*

**Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrew Litton**

Hyperion 6067824 (69' • DDD)



**Two of the great pianists of the day offer anniversary Liszt concerto recordings**

Here, from an elder and a middle statesman of the keyboard, are two sharply opposed views of Liszt's piano concertos, both fitting tributes to the anniversary celebrations. Barenboim, who in his first recording of the concertos offers them in reverse order, may be in the autumn of his career but 'autumnal' is hardly the word for a musician of such tireless commitment to music in its widest human implications. Taken live from the Klavier-Festival Ruhr and blessed with an



awe-inspiring partnership with Boulez, Barenboim reaches out to a symphonic grandeur and musical range undreamt of by lesser musicians. Time and again he shines a wholly personal light on music that has all too often encouraged (notably on the competition circuit) a facile alternative to quality. Seizing every opportunity for rhetorical grandeur as well as glitter, he makes Liszt's musical possibilities stretch far into the horizon; and the same is true of his two encores. He sings his heart out in the D flat *Consolation* (that glowing *cantabile*, that seamless *legato*), a marvel of poetic confidentiality, and in the first *Valse oubliée* he is daring to the point of idiosyncrasy, conveying a pained sense of nostalgia and disillusionment central to Liszt's final dark-hued years. Here again you sense an artist for whom there are no short cuts in that always perilous and elusive journey to musical truth.

With his apt and more substantial coupling of the Grieg Concerto (Liszt greatly admired Grieg and had no small hand in the Concerto, notably in the cadenza), Stephen Hough continues to bemuse as a pianist so free from difficulty that he can soar, inflect and alter the course of a musical argument at the drop of a hat. Introspective (but never lost in introspection) one minute, of the most refined bravura the next, he expresses a personality all his own, brilliantly alert to mercurial changes of mood and clearly riding on the crest of a wave of success. With technique honed to a state of diamond-like brilliance, he gives us rapier-like cadenzas and *glissandos* (at the close of the Second Concerto) that flash like summer lightning. Both discs are finely recorded (particularly DG's) and are indispensable to Lisztians, whether for the voltage of Barenboim's imaginative vision or for Hough's unnerving expertise and assurance. Difficult to resist adding, however, that Martha Argerich has resisted all blandishments to issue her 2003 EMI disc of the First Concerto and has so far shied away from recording the Second Concerto, music once central to her repertoire. **Bryce Morrison**

## Mahler

Symphony No 6

Philharmonia Orchestra / Esa-Pekka Salonen  
Signum © SIGCD275 (81' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London,  
May 2009

## Mahler

Symphony No 6

Orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa  
Cecilia / Antonio Pappano  
EMI Ⓑ © 084413-2 (85' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Sala Cecilia, Auditorium Parco  
della Musica, Rome, January 2011



### Mahler's exploration of fate caught live in London and Rome

We have Mahler's twin anniversary years to thank for the latest wave of concert recordings. Here two of today's most perspicacious music directors tackle what was once reckoned an implausibly gruelling assignment even by the composer's disciples. Attitudes have changed but controversies remain, principally over the running order of the middle movements. Mahler wrote the symphony with the *Scherzo* placed before the slow movement, then switched the order and, as is now clear, never reverted to the original sequence in performance. Antonio Pappano and Esa-Pekka Salonen nevertheless put the *Scherzo* first, a decision buttressed by Julian Johnson's booklet-note for Signum (even if he implies that all three hammer-blows will be heard in the finale). Both readings also observe the first-movement exposition repeat and have had the concluding applause lopped off.

In other respects they are worlds apart. Salonen famously began his relationship with the Philharmonia as a late stand-in conducting Mahler's Third in 1983: he was then still in his twenties and more composer than maestro. Recently, as the ensemble's chief, he has returned to Mahler in the context of a concert series surveying the emergence of musical modernism in Vienna, 'city of dreams'. In showing how Mahler opens the door to new possibilities, Salonen's approach is consistently hard-edged and unfussy, although he will occasionally take a passage haltingly as if intensifying the gloom – this happens just before the first movement's less-than-wholly euphoric dash to the finishing line. Admirers of Leonard Bernstein's celebrated recordings will probably find Salonen too cool and it is true that his Los Angeles sojourn would seem to have impacted on his composing more than his conducting. Structural coherence remains the prerequisite of the latter: 'if you stop for too long to smell the flowers along the road then you lose sight of the goal'. Rubato is carefully rationed, which makes much of the score turn mechanistic and dark. The *Andante* alone seems rather pale; the finale is uncommonly cogent.

Coming to the orchestral scores via longer acquaintance with the vocal music, Pappano prefers a more emotive style, with variously blended textures and a bigger string sound. Marginally slower tempi necessitate a split between discs. Pappano plainly has a congenial venue: Salonen's Royal Festival Hall imparts a certain

thinness of string tone and bluntness of timbre whereas EMI's production has the opulence associated with studio efforts. The big question is whether either account deserves to find an audience beyond the committed pool of concert attendees and/or fans of the man up front. Salonen's dour conception is unmistakably the product of our own times. Pappano's, with vocal exhortations from the podium and bronchial noises off, is comfort-blanket-romantic in its optimism and emotional openness.

Both orchestras are on fine form in their different ways. The gulf between them is most obvious in explicitly evocative passages. Take the rural idyll at the heart of the first movement (for all that the Italian cowbells are reticent) or the characterisation of the Trio in the second where Pappano's treatment is that much more blatant. His slow movement is predictably warmer in feeling while his finale depicts a protagonist in love with life who won't admit defeat until the very end. If you hear Mahler in terms of direct expressive communication rather than aesthetic novelty, you will find this version easier to love.

David Gutman

## Maconchy

The Land: A Suite for Orchestra. Concertino for Piano and Chamber Orchestra<sup>a</sup>. Music for Wind and Brass. Symphony for Double String Orchestra

<sup>a</sup>Clelia Iruzun p/BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra /  
Odaline de la Martinez

Lorell © LNT133 (64' • DDD)



### BBC Scottish with a look at the orchestral side of Maconchy

The 23-year-old Elizabeth Maconchy created quite a splash with *The Land*, her four-movement suite for large orchestra which enjoyed a high-profile world premiere at the Proms on August 30, 1930, under Sir Henry Wood. Inspired by Vita Sackville-West's 1926 narrative poem of the same name, it's a strikingly confident and powerful creation, full of distinctive invention, imaginatively scored and much admired by (among others) Vaughan Williams, Holst and Tovey. It's followed by the playful, crisply neo-classical Concertino for piano and chamber orchestra from 1928 (first heard in Prague a mere five months before *The Land*, with the composer Ervin Schulhoff as soloist) and *Music for Wind and Brass*, a characteristically absorbing nine-minute essay written in 1966 for Morley College's annual Whitsun Festival in Thaxted, Essex. Last, but definitely not least, comes the Symphony for double string orchestra, an excitingly taut, four-movement masterwork from 1952-53, where the idiom is astringent yet often piercingly lyrical too. Resourcefully laid out and fuelled by the most





Kingdom's creator: Paul McCartney at the recording sessions for his new ballet score

bracing counterpoint and seemingly boundless rhythmic zest, it culminates in a deeply expressive Passacaglia that will haunt you for days, I promise.

Odaline de la Martinez's performances with the BBC Scottish SO have endearing spirit and no mean discipline to commend them; the London-based Brazilian pianist Clelia Iruzun is on notably deft form in the Concertino. Admittedly Vernon Handley's pioneering LSO version of the Symphony has a touch greater purpose and concentration – and Lyrta's vintage (analogue) Kingsway Hall recording evinces a glow, depth and bite not quite matched by this (digital) newcomer – but the bottom line remains the same: we are lucky to have both. **Andrew Achenbach**

*Symphony – selected comparison:*

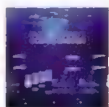
LSO, Handley (LYRD) SRCD288

## McCartney

Ocean's Kingdom

London Classical Orchestra / John Wilson

Decca © 723 3250 (57' • DDD)



**The latest light-music offering from Beatle Paul**

*Ocean's Kingdom* was commissioned by New York City Ballet and premiered in New York in September 2011. The scenario, featuring amorous conflicts in an underwater kingdom invaded by earthly intruders, is Paul

McCartney's own. That it has come in for much criticism is of little moment in considering the score as a purely auditory experience. It's not Tchaikovsky or Stravinsky, and it isn't The Beatles either. Nor is it even Carl Davis, who was McCartney's collaborator on the *Liverpool Oratorio* and who has since been much occupied with ballet. Rather, the impression is of atmospheric music, with little forward momentum. The first of four separate movements is built around a three-note motif, portraying Ocean's Kingdom as a languid place, after which matters are spurred into rhythmic action in the perky dance motif of the second movement ('Hall of Dance'). Things lapse somewhat in a third movement ('Imprisonment'), which may offer plenty of action on stage but comes off less well in sound only. The final movement ('Moonrise') then works up gratifyingly bolder orchestral strokes as it rises towards an undeniably haunting and climactic final theme.

Superior souls may complain of a lack of great substance; but that's the nature of much ballet music. What's on offer is agreeably tuneful and sometimes stimulating music, with undeniably sumptuous orchestral sound. With technical support from John Wilson (arranger as well as conductor) and Andrew Cottee (orchestrator), the ultimate impression is of music with a rightful place in the British light orchestral tradition. **Andrew Lamb**

## Mozart

Piano Concertos – No 24, K491; No 25, K503

Ronald Brautigam *fp*

Cologne Academy / Michael Alexander Willens

BIS © BIS-SACD1894 (55' • DDD/DSD)



**Latest from Ronald Brautigam  
Mozart Concerto traversal**

If Mozart concertos on the fortepiano still conjure images of winsome Dresden china shepherdesses, this beautifully recorded disc should make you think again. Playing on a fine, un-jangly modern copy of an Anton Walter instrument, with its silvery, singing treble and clear, percussive bass, Ronald Brautigam gives bold, invigorating performances of these contrasting concertos from 1786. Choosing swift tempi (the opening movement of K503 is more *con brio* than *maestoso*), Brautigam thinks big, phrasing in long, surging spans and imbuing Mozart's passagework with a powerful sense of direction. K491 drives passionately, even impetuously forward, with minimal affectionate or elegiac lingering in the first movement's lyrical themes. In the first-movement developments of both concertos Brautigam and the responsive Cologne period band create a thrilling sense of ineluctably mounting tension, with an ideal clarity of texture in the elaborate contrapuntal imbroglio of K503. The pianist's cadenzas (Mozart's own do not survive) are refreshingly brief and ungimmicky.

Brautigam's gift of thinking large and seeing long pays dividends in the majestic *Andante* of K503 (enhanced by discreet embellishments), though the brisk, no-nonsense tempo in the *Larghetto* of K491 can short-change the music's charm. Even the excellent Cologne woodwind players sound a shade flustered in the first episode, while the serenading second episode is urgent rather than sensuous, à la *Così fan tutte*. Brautigam's conception of *Allegretto* for the finales, too, is unusually fast, though unlike some performers he has noted that Mozart's time signature in K491 indicates two rather than four beats to a bar. Occasionally in K503 a passage sounds over-impatient. Far more often, in both finales Brautigam's choice of speeds is indicated by the clarity and point of his articulation, and his delicate, spontaneous-sounding inflections of the melodic line. Whatever my reservations, this is exhilarating, often thought-provoking Mozart-playing, at least a match for the more broadly conceived but less boldly projected – and sometimes slightly mannered – Archiv recordings from Malcolm Bilson and John Eliot Gardiner.

**Richard Wigmore**

*Selected comparison:*

Bilson, EBS, Gardiner (7/88, 2/90) (ARCH) 463 111-2AB9



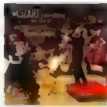
## Mozart

Symphonies – No 39, K543<sup>a</sup>; No 40, K550<sup>b</sup>

Orchestra Mozart / Claudio Abbado

DG © 477 9792AH (66' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Auditorium Teatro Manzoni, Bologna, <sup>a</sup>June 2008 & <sup>b</sup>June 2009



### Abbado and Orchestra Mozart in the penultimate symphonies

Not always *echt* Claudio Abbado. A flaccid introduction to No 39 doesn't bode well. Mellow orchestral articulation and distant timpani subdue the theatrical force of this *Adagio* which is not alleviated in the main *Allegro*. Abbado tightens the tension in *tutti*s but slackens the line elsewhere; and only towards the end does he steadily build momentum and attack. A similar dichotomy dogs the *Andante*, the two-part first subject for strings loosely controlled while the rest of the movement is cogently expressed – mostly so the sections in F minor and B minor. Abbado then settles into a degree of consistency but his heart isn't fully in this work. There are none of the individual touches and recreative insights that he lavishes on No 40.

Don't however expect 'great tragedy' as sensed by Toscanini. Melancholy, in many facets, pervades this performance of the revised score to which Mozart added clarinets and rewrote the parts for oboes. In an interpretation also recorded live, but a year after No 39, Abbado pays much attention to instrumental balance, thereby clarifying lines and refining textures. Unusually, perhaps, he finds an air of gentle resignation in the first movement, but by working from within the music, Abbado illuminates the message and carries the listener along with him, as he does in the three other movements as well. Here is conducting tied to expressive, imaginative musicianship adding up to the totality of an experience greater than the sum of its parts.

Nalen Anthoni

Sym No 39 – selected comparison:

SCO, Mackerras (4/08) (LINN) CKD308

Sym No 40 – selected comparison:

ECO, Britten (10/68<sup>b</sup>) (DECC) 444 323-2DF2

## Rachmaninov

Symphony No 3. Caprice bohémien, Op 12.  
Vocalise, Op 34 No 14

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra /

Vasily Petrenko

EMI © 679019-2 (63' • DDD)



### Petrenko and the RLPO now on EMI for Rachmaninov

The *Caprice bohémien*, linked emotionally and chronologically to Rachmaninov's student opera *Aleko*, does not by any means play itself.

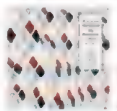
As a piece, it is a bit discursive, its initial exuberance relaxing rather too soon into a passage of slower, luxuriant melody before resuming the gypsy camp gaiety and wild abandon. But Petrenko has its measure and sees the things that can vivify it and give it structural cohesion. His discretion is a useful tool, discretion in pinpointing the orchestral colours and in finding the cumulatively exuberant paces that Rachmaninov must have intended in order to generate the music's whirlwind excitement towards the end. The RLPO play magnificently, responding to Petrenko's purposeful beat and to the sort of judgement in terms of melodic shaping that also makes the orchestral arrangement of the *Vocalise* sound so pure and unfettered in its allure.

The disc covers three stages of Rachmaninov's creative life, with the Third Symphony identifying a poignant look over the shoulder to a lost Russia when he was living as an émigré at his villa on Lake Lucerne in the 1930s. Petrenko does not dwell overly on the wistfulness but his performance more valuably shows just how potent Rachmaninov's inspiration remained in his later years. There is surging energy here allied to lucidity of orchestration and rhythmic impetus, together with that infallible sense of instrumental timbre that Rachmaninov possessed. The lyrical elements, notably but not exclusively in the central movement, are conveyed with heartfelt affection without resorting to any heart-on-sleeve excess. **Geoffrey Norris**

## Riisager

'The Symphonic Edition, Vol 1'

Symphony No 1, Op 8. Danish Pictures – No 1, Overture for Erasmus Montanus, Op 1; No 2, Klods Hans (Jack the Dullard), Op 18; No 3, Fastelavn (Carnival), Op 20; No 4, Comedie, Op 21  
Århus Symphony Orchestra / Bo Holten  
Dacapo © 8 226146 (65' • DDD)



### Pictorial works from a Danish symphonist

This first volume of Dacapo's Riisager Symphonic Edition contains works composed in his twenties and early thirties, which is to say during the last 10 years or so of the life of his great compatriot, Carl Nielsen. Nielsen is there in the background – the gaiety of his *Maskerade* Overture, and the not-so-gaiety of his *Sinfonia semplice*. But so too is a French turn of phrase, unsurprising for a pupil of Roussel and Paul le Flem.

The first of Riisager's five symphonies (1925) steps out confidently with its leaner and fitter view of the symphonic present/future (Hindemith would not be a bad guess for the innocent ear). As this never less than

respectably composed piece progresses, it is hard to suppress the suspicion that relaxation is shading into casualness and lack of direction, and that more may have been lost than gained in the search for new directions. Did Riisager throw out the symphonic baby with the philosophical bathwater, like his Swedish near-contemporary Atterberg? Only a longer period of acquaintance and the perspective of later volumes in the series will tell, and those are both prospects I look forward to.

The four pieces collectively intended as a series of 'Danish Pictures' make for lively makeweights. *Klods Hans*, *Comedie* and *Fastelavn*, all from 1929-30, intrigue by their playful appropriation of some of the most disquieting images of Nielsen's wind concertos and last symphony (for more on the Nielsen connection see Andrew Mellor's excellent online feature – [gramophone.co.uk/features/focus/send-in-the-danes](http://gramophone.co.uk/features/focus/send-in-the-danes)). Their brittle neo-classicism is not at all untypical of their times but it is certainly handled with aplomb. The much earlier *Overture for Erasmus Montanus* is, initially at least, more soft-edged but soon goes off in quirky directions.

None of these pieces is exactly easy to play, the more so since none is in any orchestra's repertoire (nor, to be realistic, ever likely to be). The Århus Symphony Orchestra acquits itself bravely under Bo Holten's firm direction and, as usual from this source, recording quality and documentation are first-rate. **David Fanning**

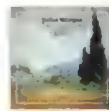
## Röntgen

Piano Concertos – No 2, Op 18; No 4

Matthias Kirschner *et al* / Hanover NDR Radio

Philharmonic Orchestra / David Porcellijn

CPO © CPO777 398-2 (59' • DDD)



### Play spot-the-influence in the well-crafted music of Röntgen

It would not be entirely fair to pigeonhole Julius Röntgen's Second Concerto (1879) as only a paraphrase of Brahms's First but only because there are passages here and there that paraphrase Schumann's Concerto instead. As an apprentice piece (Röntgen was only 24 at the time) this would get top marks, but any signs of an artist with something of his own to say are few and far between. Nor are they much more in evidence 27 years later in the Fourth Concerto, even if the actual sources of the ideas are here rather less obvious (though Brahms's E minor Cello Sonata in the finale is impossible to miss). Sincerity and polished craftsmanship radiate from this score but there is no escaping the fact that while the world had moved on, Röntgen had not.

Matthias Kirschner *et al* deserves all the acclaim coming to him these days (just a few

months ago I was highly impressed by his Shostakovich and Weinberg quintets – Hänssler Classic, 6/11). The first two phrases of the Second Concerto are enough to announce a player of uncommon discernment, and thereafter he treats every tarnished roudade as a sparkling jewel. The slow movements are not merely euphonious but have almost tangible intimacy. His accompanists also sound thoroughly attuned to the idiom.

The 21 Röntgen symphonies and seven piano concertos are quite a project, even for the indefatigable explorers at CPO. Bravo to them for lavishing such dedicated performances and first-rate recording quality on this impeccably turned-out oeuvre, which is hard to dislike yet harder still to get excited about. **David Fanning**

## Sibelius

The Tempest, Op 109 – Overture; Suites Nos 1 & 2.

Tapiola, Op 112. The Bard, Op 64

Lahti Symphony Orchestra / Okko Kamu

BIS ② BIS-SACD1945 (72' • DDD/DSD)



**First recorded fruits from the new regime in Lahti**

This new release contains BIS's second complete recording of Sibelius's Op 109: the Overture and two concert Suites (each of nine movements) from the incidental music to *The Tempest*. BIS has also issued the complete theatrical score as well (2/93).

While the Overture (also styled Prelude) was extracted with minimal amendment, the music of the suites was in places reworked significantly, resulting in delightful sequences of miniature tone-pictures to rival the more familiar *Pelleas* and *King Kristian II*. Kamu's approach is radically different to Järvi's, the latter emphasising the pictorial in highly characterised, virtuoso performances while Kamu produces leaner, less volatile accounts, often deliberate in tempo. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the tempestuous Overture (reprised in Suite No 1's Finale), where Kamu takes Sibelius at his word with the *Largamente molto* – *Largo assai* tempo, taking over seven minutes against Järvi's 4'50". The difference in pace produces a very different type of storm, one of the mind, its contrived quality according with the magical, artificial storm conjured by Shakespeare – and Prospero.

The Järvi/Gothenburg performances are undeniably more exciting musically but Kamu and the Lahti orchestra are perhaps truer to the spirit of the original and more psychologically aware. This subtlety of interpretation recurs in *The Bard* and *Tapiola*, neither of which is as outwardly colouristic as Gibson's (the second disc of Chandos's tone-poem collection – *Pohjola's Daughter, Nightride and Sunrise, The Oceanides* and *Tapiola* – remains one of the

finest Sibelius CDs ever issued). Absent too is Segerstam's exuberant sense of drama, not unlike Kajanus's pioneering 1930s recording, nor Beecham's. For Kamu, this is a drama of the imagination and one discerns dimly the forest god moving between the trees, just as Sibelius intended. With superb sound, this is strongly recommended. **Guy Rickards**

*Tapiola* – selected comparisons:

LSO, Kajanus (2/92\*) (FINL) 4509 95882-2

Helsinki PO, Segerstam (7/96) (ONDI) ODE852-2

*Tapiola, The Bard* – selected comparison:

SNO, Gibson (4/85) (CHAN) CHAN8395/6

*The Tempest* – selected comparison:

Gothenburg PO, N Järvi (BIS) BIS-CD448

## Smetana

*Má vlast*

Chamber Orchestra of Europe /

Nikolaus Harnoncourt

ORF/Styriarte ② 912 00427200 30

(161' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Video director Agnes Méth

Recorded live during the Styriarte Festival at the

Helmut-List-Halle, Graz, June 2010

Includes 'Making of "Má vlast"', a documentary film by Günter Schilhan



**Harnoncourt's Má vlast with the COE on DVD**

'My father was practically Czech,' says Nikolaus Harnoncourt after enquiring whether there are any Czech musicians in the orchestra. There aren't. 'Then I must be the only one,' he says, and thus the agenda for Günter Schilhan's *Making of 'Má vlast'* – the second DVD in this album – is set. It's a compelling hour's worth, and not just because Harnoncourt's rehearsal techniques are so revealing. He talks in interview about each piece, its narrative, themes and aspects of its orchestration. Other conductors are rarely mentioned, though he has a downer on George Szell, who he often played under when he was an orchestral cellist. Harnoncourt disliked Szell's insistence on precision above everything else and cites Furtwängler and Klemperer as being fine examples at the other end of the interpretative spectrum, where the most interesting performances often resulted from not playing exactly together. There are a handful of section rehearsals, and Harnoncourt's ability to conjure relevant images – mostly in English – rivals Carlos Kleiber's. Moments of humour lighten the mood but the overriding impression on both discs is of Harnoncourt's obvious love for the score.

Agnes Méth's video direction of the actual concert (the Helmut-List-Halle, Graz, Austria, in June 2010) is admirably restrained, with cameras homing in on groups of musicians rather than on individual players, which means you're rarely distracted by a

single close-up image. The performance is in some key respects not dissimilar to Harnoncourt's 2001 Vienna Philharmonic RCA CD, also recorded live. But I found myself far more sympathetically disposed towards this newer version, especially at the end of *Šárka*, which takes off in a way that the VPO performance doesn't (it's also quite a bit faster). It's as if the earlier *Má vlast* was a work in progress and, for its COE successor, ideas that were then fermenting finally matured. My only reservation concerns the lengths of some of Harnoncourt's pauses (I noted this on his Vienna recording too), but that's his way, a stylistic peculiarity, never without musical logic and by no means limited to the work under review. Like so many great conductors, his cueing gestures are often way ahead of the beat. At the end of the concert, the initial impression (surprisingly) is of tepid audience reaction. But the reality turns out to be quite otherwise. The audience's appreciative response grows louder by the second, with shouts of approval echoing from throughout the hall. The orchestra remains seated out of respect for the conductor, until Harnoncourt literally drags concertmaster Lorenza Borrani to her feet and the others spontaneously follow suit. All told, this handsome production is an impressive tribute to a musician who, although prone to divide critical opinion, is never less than individual, and certainly never less than interesting. **Rob Cowan**

*Selected comparison:*

VPO, Harnoncourt (A/03) (RCA) 82876 54331-2

## Stravinsky

The Firebird. Scherzo fantastique

WDR Symphony Orchestra, Cologne /

Jukka-Pekka Saraste

Profil ② PH11041 (57' • DDD)



**After impressive Mahler from Cologne Saraste has Stravinsky**

'A promising Op 3' was how Stravinsky drily dismissed his *Scherzo fantastique* of 1907-08, which did not stop him making a recording of it coupled with *The Firebird*. It goes with the larger masterpiece very well, for after the success of the three great early ballets it was itself used as a ballet in 1917, based on Maeterlinck's *Life of the Bee*, something Stravinsky later accepted with a programmatic description. Here, in a virtuoso display of some 12 minutes, is all the Rimsky-Korsakov-derived orchestral wizardry, with exhilarating twists of its own, some French touches from Dukas (*The Sorcerer's Apprentice*) and in the central section some surprisingly Wagnerian harmony (*Parsifal*), whose source even Stravinsky acknowledged.

Jukka-Pekka Saraste directs a brilliant performance of both works, skilfully recorded





PHOTOGRAPHY: WERNER KMETITSCH

No Czechs in the post: players of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe

so as to do justice to the suitably fantastic orchestration of this fantastic tale. The delicacies of the opening music, eerie and haunting, are caught with a subtle attention to detail that does not inhibit the pounding energy of the 'Danse infernale of Kashchey and his followers' nor the steady build-up of sound in the finale. Saraste takes a more openly Romantic approach to the score than Boulez or, for that matter, Stravinsky himself, but the tenderness and indeed the lushness of movements such as the 'Berceuse' are undeniable and are fully but not distortingly indulged. The 'Khorovod of the Princesses' may sound more 'Western' than it does in Russian performances but it is gracefully and well done, and Saraste is excellent at keeping the sense of drama driving forward throughout the ballet's length.

**John Warrack**

*Firebird – selected comparisons:*

Columbia SO, Stravinsky (8/92<sup>8</sup>) (SONY) SMK89875

Chicago SO, Boulez (11/93<sup>8</sup>) (DG) 471 741-2GEN

## Svendsen

'Orchestral Works, Vol 1'

Carnival in Paris, Op 9. Romeo und Julia, Op 18.

Fest-Polonaise, Op 12. Romanze, Op 26<sup>a</sup>. Zorahayda, Op 11. I fjol gjætt'e Gjeitinn (Last year I was herding the mountain goats). Sæterjentens Søndag (The Girl's Sunday on the Mountain Pasture). Norwegian Rhapsodies – No 1, Op 17; No 2, Op 19

**Wagner/Svendsen** Träume

<sup>a</sup>Marianne Thorsen *vn*

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Neeme Järvi

Chandos ⑤ CHAN10693 (80' • DDD)



**After his Halvorsen series, Järvi moves on to Svendsen**

Although Johan Svendsen's name remains familiar enough as one of the clutch of Norwegian composers one rung down from Grieg and Nordheim, his music is not as well exposed outside Norway as one would expect. Although the (mostly early) larger abstract works tend to attract the most attention nowadays, it is for his smaller, illustrative works that he was celebrated in his lifetime and this welcome Chandos collection focuses attention specifically on some of these.

Rightly praised for orchestral mastery, Svendsen's music attracted the approbation – and its composer the friendship – of Wagner and Grieg, and Nordic audiences took it and him to their hearts. It is easy to hear why in the exuberance of *Carnival in Paris*, the *Norwegian Rhapsodies* or the delicate textures of the *The Girl's Sunday on the Mountain Pasture*; I was less taken by the arrangement of Wagner's 'Träume' but the legend *Zorahayda*, based on a Moorish tale retold by Washington Irving, is a gem of compositional technique. The limitations of Svendsen's style are also readily apparent in a certain lack of character in his melodic invention; listen just

to *Romeo und Julia*, a 'symphonic introduction to Shakespeare's drama', which has none of the dramatic quality of Tchaikovsky or Prokofiev. In works such as the *Festival Polonaise* (in honour of the then newly crowned King Oscar II), his skill for occasional music is consummately realised.

With the exception of the famous Romance in G (Thorsen's is nicely realised), there are few competitors for the works included here and none gathered on the same disc. Järvi once again draws some refined and vibrant playing from the Bergen Philharmonic and Chandos's warm sound is vivid and bright.

**Guy Rickards**

## Tchaikovsky

Symphony No 6, 'Pathétique'. Capriccio Italien, Op 45

Russian National Orchestra / Mikhail Pletnev

Pentatone ⑤ PTC5186 386 (62' • DDD/DSD)

## Tchaikovsky

The Nutcracker

Vesna Children's Choir;

Russian National Orchestra / Mikhail Pletnev

Online ⑤ ② ODE1180-2D (93' • DDD)



**Pletnev and his Russian orchestra in Tchaikovsky for concert and stage**

On this evidence, Mikhail Pletnev remains one of the most intelligent and stylish Tchaikovsky conductors around. His 1991 account of the *Pathétique* still strikes me as a thing of wonder, fabulously played, studded with revelatory detail and pleasingly spontaneous-sounding to boot. When Pletnev returned to the symphony four years later as part of his DG cycle, the fires had dimmed a little, though it's still an uncommonly classy effort by any standards. If this team's third recording is not quite their equal, it still serves up plenty of food for thought. Certainly, Pletnev possesses the happy knack of making one appreciate afresh just how extraordinarily novel and daringly spare much of the scoring is (for instance, in the dusky introduction, Tchaikovsky's subtle deployment of divided violas and double basses). The *Scherzo* in particular ignites, the tempo challengingly swift yet without any suggestion of breathless fluster (indeed, the control is awesome). At the same time, there's an element of restraint about Pletnev's treatment of those toweringly eloquent second subjects in the first movement and finale which I personally find supremely touching but which, I readily acknowledge, will not be for everyone. The *Capriccio italien* is comparably tasteful and unvulgar but falls well short in outsize charisma (Slava

and the Berliners on DG simply blow your socks off). The sound, too, could do with greater bloom and lustre.

*The Nutcracker* enshrines another formidably assured display that repeatedly has one gasping at the wondrous skill with which Tchaikovsky handles his forces. Once again, the playing of the RNO is past praise in its unruffled, articulate composure (the whole of the Act 2 Divertissement is a joy), and Pletnev's direction is strong, clear-sighted and unsentimental, the transformation scene and battle music in Act 1 especially generating a terrific sense of spectacle and edge-of-seat thrust respectively. What's in shorter supply, perhaps, is the tingling fantasy, balletic flair and whiff of greasepaint so conspicuously present on a whole host of tried-and-trusted favourites – Dorati (with the LSO on Mercury, 9/92, and RCO on Philips, 11/80<sup>R</sup>), Ansermet (Australian Eloquence, 5/82<sup>R</sup>), Previn (EMI, 3/93), Ozawa (DG) and Gergiev (Philips, 1/99) all instantly spring to mind. Both the 'Waltz of the Snowflakes' and 'Waltz of the Flowers' are just a little charmless, while Act 2's glorious Pas de deux 'Intrada' serves up plenty of high drama but rather less in the way of passion. Still, admirers of Pletnev and his remarkable band will find much to relish. Ondine's engineering has lots of dynamic impact but lacks something in mid-range glow. **Andrew Achenbach**

*Sym No 6 – selected comparisons:*

Russian Nat Orch, Pletnev (1/92<sup>R</sup>) (VIRG) 561636-2

Russian Nat Orch, Pletnev (12/96<sup>R</sup>) (DG) 477 8699GB7

## Vaughan Williams

Symphony No 2, 'A London Symphony'<sup>a</sup>.

Oboe Concerto<sup>b</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Stéphane Rancourt *ob*

Hallé Orchestra / Sir Mark Elder

Hallé © CDHLL7529 (66' • DDD)

<sup>a</sup>Recorded live at Bridgewater Hall, Manchester, October 2010



Elder with the London  
live in Manchester

What healthy shape the Hallé are in these days. As dawn breaks over the capital, one could hardly fail to be impressed by the stunning refinement and immaculate blend of the orchestral playing. As both tempo and dynamics increase, though, where's the surge of adrenalin and tremendous sense of pent-up energy that propels the rest of the symphony on its irresistible course? Maybe it's the slightly cushioned Bridgewater Hall acoustic, I don't know, but Elder sets the emotional thermostat at slightly too low a temperature throughout; the anguished cry that opens the finale goes for little and the ensuing

processional's full tragic force is only intermittently conveyed.

By way of comparison, I dug out Barbirolli's classic 1957 recording (also with the Hallé): here you'll encounter music-making of such infectious spontaneity, temperament, compassion and inimitably ruddy complexion that a life-enhancing experience is guaranteed. As for this latest contender, there's heaps to admire in terms of polish, coordination and meticulous observation but rather less that truly warms the cockles. Overall, Elder's is not a *London Symphony* to join my own shortlist of Barbirolli's Pye/Nixa recording mentioned above (Dutton), Boult's blisteringly cogent 1952 LPO account for Decca, the big-hearted 1972 LSO/Previn and Handley's cherishably idiomatic 1992 remake with the RLPO.

The Oboe Concerto (which brings a beneficial switch of venue to BBC Manchester's Studio 7) is more to my liking. Hallé principal Stéphane Rancourt makes an exquisitely poised and affectionate soloist, while Elder and his responsive Hallé strings play their full part in a lovely performance of unstinting poetry and illumination that does justice to this still underrated piece.

**Andrew Achenbach**

*London Sym – selected comparisons:*

LPO, Boult (9/52<sup>R</sup>) (DECC) 473 241-2DC5

Hallé, Barbirolli (2/59<sup>R</sup>) (DUTT) CDS7B1021

LSO, Previn (8/72<sup>R</sup>) (RCA) 82876 55708-2

RLPO, Handley (8/93) (CFP) 575309-2

## Vivaldi

Le quattro stagioni, Op 8 Nos 1-4. Violin Concerto, 'La tempesta di mare', Op 8 No 5 RV253

Altamira Chamber Orchestra / Robert Atchison *vn*

with Sir Michael Gambon *narr*

Guild © GMCD7375 (55' • DDD)

## Vivaldi

Le quattro stagioni, Op 8 Nos 1-4. Violin Concertos – 'L'amoroso', RV271; 'Il favorito', RV277; RV375

Elizabeth Blumenstock *vn*

Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra / Nicholas McGegan

Philharmonia Baroque © PBPO3 (76' • DDD)



### The latest eight seasons made in San Francisco and London

It's a tribute both to Vivaldi's music and to the present performers that two such different recordings of *The Four Seasons* can be so satisfying to the same listener. A former member of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields and co-principal to Iona Brown, violinist Robert Atchison formed the modern-instrument Altamira Orchestra in 2009. This is their first recording, on which they are joined by legendary British actor Sir Michael

Gambon, who reads Vivaldi's sonnets in an English translation by Jordan Lancaster.

Far from being a distraction, Gambon's mellow intoning of Vivaldi's word-paintings (themselves based on lost paintings by Marco Ricci), like Patrick Stewart's for Arnie Roth and Musica Anima (American Gramophone [sic]), enhance the music's word-painting – a true feast for the senses. Atchison is all elegance and refinement; this is a very English Vivaldi, not without drama but closer in spirit to Alan Loveday's 1970 recording with the ASMF than to Iona Brown's more than a quarter of a century later. There is a pleasing dreamlike, almost yearning quality here: this is a wistful looking back on the past rather than an attempt to recreate it.

Period-instrument band Philharmonia Baroque's recording is the third to be released by their own label, which was launched in January 2011 to celebrate their 30th anniversary. Baroque violinist Elizabeth Blumenstock is a PBO regular, having performed with them as soloist, concertmaster and leader since 1981. She plays a 1660 Guarneri.

In contrast to Atchison's approach, this is very much in the HIP camp: the tempi are brisker (compare the former's 3'00" in the *Largo* of 'Spring' with McGegan's 2'18"), the string tone more transparent, the downbeats more pronounced and the attack and articulation far more varied. There is also liberal ornamentation and rhetorical flourish from Blumenstock, though she is less mannered and less driven than Italians such as Fabio Biondi. In contrast to Atchison's vocal, horizontal approach, Blumenstock is vertical, the pulse energised more though adumbration of the underlying harmonic structure. The effect is extraordinary.

Both recordings are equally satisfying but offer entirely different solutions to the same problem; they also offer different fillers. The choice is yours. **William Yeoman**

*Four Seasons – selected comparisons:*

Biondi, *Europa Galante* (3/04) (VIRG) 545547-2

Loveday, ASMF (DECC) 475 7531DOR

Brown, ASMF (HANS) CD98 107

## Widor

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 39; No 2, Op 77.

Fantaisie, Op 62

Martin Roscoe *pf*

BBC Concert Orchestra / Martin Yates

Dutton Epoch © CDLX7275 (74' • DDD)

## Widor

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 55'

Piano Concertos – No 1, Op 39; No 2, Op 77.

Fantaisie, Op 62

Markus Becker *pf*

BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Thierry Fischer

Hyperion © CDA67817 (72' • DDD)





### Hyperion and Dutton with precisely the same Widor

A mere five minutes or so of Widor's prolific output has come to define and pigeonhole him. So popular has the famous Toccata finale of his Fifth Organ Symphony become that most people are unaware that he wrote anything other than organ music, though in fact the majority of his 87 opus numbers does not feature the organ at all.

Eager to prove the point and arriving like a couple of No 6 buses come two releases of exactly the same programme in exactly the same order: Hyperion can claim 'first recording' status by dint of setting down their versions eleven months earlier (2010) than Dutton (May 2011). Both merit our attention because of the (perhaps surprising) quality of the music and, given the artists involved, the (not at all surprising) excellence of the performances and recordings on the two labels.

All three works are far more than vapid virtuoso showpieces, though all contain their share of thundering octaves and brilliant virtuoso display. The First Concerto, completed in 1876, the most conventional of the three, has many arresting, individual touches and themes. Like the Second (1905), it is resourcefully orchestrated with a host of original ideas, such as the accompanied violin solo just before the finale. The jewel here is the *Fantaisie* (1889), lasting over 22 minutes, with many unusual episodes, glimpses of Saint-Saëns, Franck, Brahms and Liszt, but still uniquely Widor.

As far as the soloists, orchestras and conductors are concerned, I am going to sit on the fence – not the most helpful advice for you the prospective customer – but the fact is that, once the pros and cons have been weighed, there is little to choose between them. Overall tempi are remarkably similar on both discs (the timing of one *Fantaisie* is within seconds of the other); Becker and Fischer take a slightly brisker view of the concertos' outer movements in which, however, Roscoe and Yates are marginally more flamboyant. Roscoe has more fun with the music-hall character of the First Concerto's last movement and is the more imaginative of the two in passages such as that in the Second Concerto's second movement marked *agitato* (*piano solo, librement*), leading to another marked *très égal, sonorité d'Harmonica* (3'07"); and compare the way the brass round off this movement in Dutton's warmer acoustic with Fischer's more restrained attack.

Hyperion, on the other hand, opts for a more transparent sound picture and slightly clearer woodwind and brass detail, matched by Becker's lighter, sparkling touch; they have the

better booklet (Nigel Simeone) – and, of course, if you are collecting their Romantic Piano Concerto series it will be de facto the first choice. **Jeremy Nicholas**

### Philippe Schartz

'Après la nuit...'

**Arutunian Elegy Copland Quiet City<sup>a</sup> Hindemith Concerto for Trumpet, Bassoon and Strings<sup>b</sup>**

**Jolivet Concertino for Trumpet, String Orchestra and Piano<sup>c</sup> Wiltgen après la nuit...**

**Philippe Schartz** *tpt/flugelhorn* with

<sup>a</sup>**Sarah-Jayne Porsmoguer** *cor anglais*

<sup>b</sup>**Karen Geoghegan** *bn* <sup>c</sup>**Chris Williams** *pf*

**Solistes Européens, Luxembourg / Christoph König**  
Chandos © CHAN10700 (61' • DDD)



### Rare concerti from the BBC NOW's principal trumpet

Philippe Schartz is renowned for his radiant tone, bright and decisive yet never uncompromising. Such are the requirements for the febrile Jolivet Concertino, a work which Maurice André famously fashioned on disc alongside the Second Concerto, *Heptade* and *Arioso barocco* – in effect the complete Jolivet trumpeting oeuvre (available in Erato's recent Maurice André Edition).

Schartz is happy to swing with the jazz in this concentrated showpiece from 1948, breathing the exotic fumes of the composer's quasi-opium-infused hybrid style. The overall effect is 'ruder' than André and more restless than Marsalis (Sony); in addition, the way he juxtaposes edginess and suave melodic shape in the muted second movement is as compelling as you'll hear anywhere.

The relatively uncharismatic personality of the Solistes Européens affects the climax of the Jolivet and also neutralises the role of the strings in both the pacing and atmosphere of Copland's *Quiet City*. The evocative dialogues of the trumpet and cor anglais rarely take flight as they do in the gloriously golden panoply of the famous Neville Marriner recording (Argo).

Hindemith's Concerto for trumpet and bassoon has long deserved a persuasive performance. However dry and stubbornly functional Hindemith can seem to modern ears, Schartz and Karen Geoghegan relish the neo-classical delicacy and wit which lurk beneath the ruddy surface; the former's alert and controlled placement of unusually introverted trumpet-writing (none of the *Mit Kraft* of the Trumpet Sonata) beautifully matches the ripe and kaleidoscopic bassoon playing.

The recently commissioned *après la nuit...* (2010) by Roland Wiltgen is, again, played with flair by Schartz but this constitutes a long 20 minutes for all but the contemporary trumpet aficionado. Perhaps another

mainstream concerto to match the rich pickings earlier (such as Birtwistle or Bernhard Krol) might have raised the stakes further on this enterprising release?

**Jonathan Freeman-Attwood**

### 'The Mahler Album'

**Beethoven String Quartet No 11, 'Serioso', Op 95 (arr Mahler) Mahler Symphony No 5 – Adagietto. Symphony No 10 – Adagio**

**Amsterdam Sinfonietta / Candida Thompson**

Channel Classics © 35111 (60' • DDD/DSD)



### Thompson's restless ensemble with a unique view of Mahler

Combining finely honed performances with unimpeachable sound engineering and imaginative design, this state-of-the-art production deserves to transcend doubts about the viability of the programme itself. 'The Mahler Album' is what it says on the front of the booklet but the only work presented complete is a tweaked version of Beethoven's *Quartetto serioso*. In a previous guise, the ensemble recorded this for BIS in the mid-1990s alongside Mahler's similar fleshing-out of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*. Mahler justified such renderings on the grounds that 'In a large space the four voices are lost and do not speak to the listener with the power that the composer wanted to give them. I give them this power by strengthening the voices.' As in the past, today's chamber music mavens are likely to find the results overblown, although group members must have mulled over every bar in detail to secure an agreed line on the finer points of articulation, vibrato and so forth.

The notion of pairing Mahler's Beethoven arrangement with his own *Adagietto* is not new. Kenneth Slowik placed them alongside Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht* in a collection employing instruments from the Smithsonian collection and a playing style self-consciously modelled on what we know of relevant 'period' practice. With her crack band of 22 reinforced by extra players, Candida Thompson and friends give the *Adagietto* more room to breathe, embracing the widest range of tempi and dynamics within a 10'35" frame (the indicated timing of 11 minutes is oddly wide of the mark). New to me, though dating from 1971, is the string-ensemble version of the opening movement of the Tenth, a reduction which might be thought to add further confusion to that score's vexed performance history, however committed the music-making.

The Mahler slow movements are presented as outer panels, the Beethoven in the middle. Over to you. **David Gutman**

*Serioso, Adagietto – selected comparison:*

*Smithsonian Chbr Phrs, Slowik (2/97) (DHM) 05472 77374-2*

# Chamber



David Vickers reviews Fretwork's Goldberg Variations transcription  
*'With such a feast on offer, harpsichords never crossed my heretical mind'*

► REVIEW ON PAGE 54



Philip Clark reviews Roger Reynolds's Sanctuary  
*'All those composers who have grafted over cod-Romantic emoting need to think again.'*

► REVIEW ON PAGE 57

## Bach

Goldberg Variations, BWV988

Fretwork

Harmonia Mundi ® ② HMU90 7560 (90' • DDD)



Bach reworked heralds a new beginning for Fretwork

This is Fretwork's first recording to be released since the tragic passing of founder-member Richard Campbell (who was not involved in this project). This arrangement of the *Goldberg Variations* for viols in up to six parts is the brainchild of another original founder, Richard Boothby, who provides a short booklet-note that is erudite, friendly and humble (there is also an illuminating commentary on the music written by John Butt). Manifold imaginative reinventions of Bach's music modernise scorings and textures but Boothby's transcriptions are an unusual yet fascinating advocacy for a consort of viols that Bach would have considered archaic.

A sequel of sorts to Fretwork's album 'Alio modo' (10/05) that rearranged a miscellaneous selection of Bach's keyboard works, there is nothing disloyal about these intoxicating performances. There are plenty of variations in which the sonority of the viols does not sound far removed from the much older polyphonic consort repertoire in which Fretwork made its name, although it is also striking how many valuable musical details are yielded by the consort's conversational playing; the supreme quality of musical understanding and listening between the six players is a joy to hear. As the spirit of the music dictates, Fretwork produces playing of astonishing imagination (eg use of lively *pizzicato* for arpeggiated passages in Var 20), dexterity (beautifully sustained trills during Var 28) or intense melancholy (the *adagio* of Var 25). With such a feast on offer, harpsichords never crossed my heretical mind. **David Vickers**

## Bantock • Holbrooke

Bantock Viola Sonata, 'Colleen'

Holbrooke Violin Sonata, 'The Grasshopper'

Rupert Marshall-Luck vn/va Matthew Rickard pf

EM Records ® EMRCDO03 (67' • DDD)



A rather English marriage of two old friends

This disc brings together two neglected composers closely related by their friendship. Bantock, richer and 10 years older, helped Holbrooke when he was struggling, letting him live as a lodger in his house, while encouraging his work as a composer.

Holbrooke's Violin Sonata of 1917 comes first on the disc and offers a reconstruction of the composer's original score. Evidently the first performance used not a piano but an orchestration, and both the scale of the work and the inclusion of a cadenza-like passage in the finale suggest that that was Holbrooke's fullest intention, though later he did a revision with cuts, which Rupert Marshall-Luck has here opened out.

The first movement is a jolly *Allegro* in a skipping rhythm, leading to a lyrical slow movement and a finale that brings much double-stopping and chattering quavers, presumably accounting for the title *The Grasshopper* and some of the themes, which enjoy a happy relationship with the popular songs of the period.

Bantock's Viola Sonata dates from July and August 1919, when Bantock was staying at his summer home. His happiness is plainly reflected in the surging piano-writing and expanse of the work, with each movement lasting over 10 minutes, and though it may be thought too long for its material, he draws the movements together by the use of a striking *idée fixe* linked to the composer's initials, GB.

The very opening exploits the viola's rich lower register (helped in this performance by the use of a viola owned by Gustav Holst). The expansiveness of each movement brings many changes of tempo and mood, with the central movement marked *Maestoso* but including many moments of meditation and a noble climactic melody towards the end.

Whether on violin or viola, Marshall-Luck plays with ideal purity over the widest range, important in both works when high harmonics are involved. Matthew Rickard's piano-playing is also impressive, notably in the flamboyant writing in the Bantock. The

recording balance fairly enough tends to favour the string instruments, with agreeably natural piano tone. **Edward Greenfield**

## Dohnányi • Penderecki

Dohnányi Sextet, Op 37 Penderecki Sextet

Ensemble Kheops

Fuga Libera ® FUG585 (59' • DDD)



East European heavyweights showcase diverse heritage

A really meaty coupling, this. Ernő Dohnányi's C major Sextet, a product of the mid-1930s, covers an extremely wide range of moods and skilfully exploits the expressive potential of all six instruments. The opening *Allegro appassionato* sets out over rolling cello arpeggios and presents its arguments with rigour and clarity. This is genuine creative craftsmanship, and just as apparent at the misty start of the *Intermezzo* second movement, music that with its eerie feelings of suspense recalls the world of late Brahms. The third movement is a gentle *Allegro* with a centre-placed *scherzo* episode (echoes there of Brahms's Horn Trio) and some heart-warming writing for strings. But the happiest moment is when this *con sentimento* third movement suddenly swings into the offbeat *giocoso* finale, music once heard never forgotten. It's a real joy and the Ensemble Kheops are fully on a par with my fine old ASV CD with the Endymion Ensemble (with Fibich's Op 42 Quintet: 2/96 – nla), maybe just a tad more winning in the finale's kitschy waltz-time passages.

Penderecki's Sextet (premiered in 2000) is a tougher listen, though not half as tough as it might have been had he written it in the 1970s or thereabouts, when the composer's style was more uncompromisingly experimental. Although apparently difficult to play, the music isn't as forbidding as you might expect. Echoes of Stravinsky, Bartók, Hindemith, Shostakovich and (to my ears) Weill abound, the opening march-like figure leading on to motor-driven virtuoso writing and some fierce rhythms (odd stopped notes on the horn are like wasp-stings bothering the texture). This teeming invention spills over



PHOTOGRAPHY: JULIEN POHL



Ensemble Kheops: persuasive interpreters of Dohnányi and Penderecki

into the 20-minute second movement, where the mood eventually settles to something far quieter and darker, though the extraordinarily beautiful closing moments offer a semblance of light, rather like the end of Bartók's last quartet does. As for the Ensemble Kheops, no praise could be too high: unbelievably, they sound as if they were born to play both works. They're not only technically superb but wholly convincing interpreters, and the crystal-clear recorded sound matches their playing in its excellence. **Rob Cowan**

## Dvořák

Love Songs, Op 83 B160<sup>3</sup>. Cypresses, B152 - Nos 1, 2, 8, 9 & 11<sup>b</sup>. Piano Quintet, Op 81 B155<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Adriana Kučerová *sop* <sup>ac</sup>Christoph Eschenbach *pf*  
<sup>bc</sup>Thymos Quartet

Avie © AV2234 (75' • DDD • T/t)



The rarely-heard Love Songs with Dvořák chamber greats

A great programming idea, this – couching the predominantly lyrical A major Piano Quintet in the context of love songs, both as originally conceived and as transformed into various *Cypresses* for string quartet. The sequence opens with eight songs sensitively sung by soprano Adriana Kučerová, a vocal epitome of amatory responsiveness, then we're given five of the songs in their quartet versions, not in the same order (good move!) and tenderly phrased, especially the third of them ('In deepest forest glade').

No complaints whatever about the playing of the Thymos Quartet, who prove animated narrators of these heartfelt confessions, nor in

the mostly vivacious 'second' Quintet. But the real star of the show is pianist Christoph Eschenbach, whose accompaniments in the songs truly amount to added commentaries and who is the ideal playing partner in the Quintet, softening his touch whenever his colleagues need to take the lead, then asserting himself according to the dictates of the musical moment. Put on virtually any extended passage in the first movement, and you'll experience the joy of Eschenbach's three-dimensional approach. Also, his poetic phrasing in the *Scherzo's* Trio: that should really make you smile. Were I asked to choose a recording that demonstrates chamber-music piano-playing at its most sensitive and collaborative, this would definitely be a strong contender. Tempi for the second movement are often uncommonly slow (even from the opening viola melody), and the closing moments are positively elegiac. Still, the *Scherzo* lifts the spirits, and the extrovert mood carries through to the finale.

Throughout the entire performance there's no mistaking the leader of the pack: one is always aware of listening to an excellent quartet and an exceptional pianist. Absolutely no harm in that! **Rob Cowan**

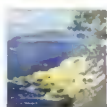
## Franck • Ysaÿe

Franck Cello Sonata. Nocturne (arr Kniazev)

Ysaÿe Berceuse (arr Kniazev). Poème élégiaque

Alexander Kniazev *vc* Plamena Mangova *pf*

Fuga Libera © FUG587 (55' • DDD)



Franck's violin music for cello, and inspirational Ysaÿe

Here are two Belgian composers in cello music on a Belgian label but with a Russian cellist and a Bulgarian pianist. Franck himself approved of the cello arrangement of his Violin Sonata made by Jules Delsart, and this is a performance to convince any doubters. Kniazev takes the first movement, marked *Allegro ben moderato*, far slower than usual, for he and Mangova make it into a deeply reflective meditation, exploiting the lower range of the cello.

As though in compensation, the second movement is taken fast with crisply surging piano-writing, difficult even at a slower speed. The expressive recitative of the third movement then leads into an exhilarating account of the finale which culminates in a satisfyingly powerful climax. The Nocturne which comes as supplement is then a simple arrangement of what was originally a song to words by Louis de Fourcaud.

Eugene Ysaÿe, primarily a violin virtuoso, was inspired in his compositions by his fellow Belgian, Lekeu, with some striking harmonies. The Berceuse was originally written for a small chamber group but was then arranged for piano solo, a version which Kniazev has here arranged for cello and piano. So too with the much longer *Poème élégiaque*, inspired by the story of Romeo and Juliet. Interestingly, this was the piece which prompted Chausson to write his popular *Poème*. Though the recording balance tends to favour the cello, that seems apt enough on an attractive disc.

**Edward Greenfield**

## M Haydn • Mozart

**M Haydn Duos** – No 1, MH335 (PI27); No 2, MH336 (PI28) **Mozart Duos** – K423; K424. 12 Duos, K487 – Menuetto (Allegro)

Rachel Podger *vn* Jane Rogers *va*

Channel Classics © CCSSA32411 (73' • DDD/DSD)



### Flesh on the bones of sketchy Mozart

It may be impertinent to begin with a comparison dating back to 1948, of K423 played by Szymon Goldberg and Frederick Riddle (Opus Kura), but the pulses in the first two movements are virtually identical to those of Rachel Podger and Jane Rogers; yet in their dynamic flexibility and shaping of phrases, Goldberg and Riddle are circumscribed to a mode of expression that was of their day. Today, Podger and Rogers offer perceptions that are distinctly different.

No virtuoso excitement, but a virtuoso ease to the rhythmic elasticity of the playing; and the sinuous lines, the subtle variations within sonorities, the enunciation of inflections and nuances that cannot be written, all amount to an artist's right to interpretation. Podger and Rogers use theirs, adding tonal gradations to long sections of K424 that Mozart left bare. They do him proud; as they do Michael Haydn, whose Duos are not quite in the same league. Two slow movements of substance don't compensate for outer movements that seem routine. But then, Haydn was ill and his salary had been docked by Archbishop Colloredo until the commission for six Duos had been completed – which is when Mozart stepped in to compose the remaining two recorded here. And a Menuetto, No 2 from the Duos for basset-horn (not horn as stated), played with equal care, forms a fitting coda this programme. Excellent SACD sound and balance but an ambient acoustic would have made for an even finer production.

Nalen Anthoni

## Haydn

**Piano Trios** – HobXV/24; 'Gypsy Rondo', HobXV/25; HobXV/26; HobXV/31

**Kungsbacka Piano Trio**

Naxos © 8 572040 (53' • DDD)



### Neglected Haydn begins to re-emerge with collected Trios

'Piano Trios – 1' says the inlay card, and it's only to be hoped that the Kungsbacka Trio's survey of this somewhat neglected tranche of Haydn's output means to go on as it starts. Richard Wigmore, in his Haydn Faber Pocket Guide (a veritable bible for those Haydnistas who weary of lugging around Robbins Landon's massive five-volume magnum opus) ranks the trios 'among Haydn's least-known

masterpieces', while noting the so-called *Gypsy Rondo* Trio's popularity, owing to the finale that gives the work its sobriquet.

That trio is included here, along with Nos 24 and 26, with which it formed a group in 1795 dedicated to Haydn's lover Rebecca Schroeter, and No 31, conceived a year earlier as a single movement for the gifted pianist Therese Jansen but published almost a decade later as a two-movement work. Trio No 26 (first on the disc) contains the magical F sharp major slow movement that reappears in Symphony No 102, while Trio No 31 is sometimes nicknamed 'Jacob's Dream', after its characteristic rapid violin scales. So it's clear that there are riches indeed among the trios.

Andrew Keener's sound (Potton Hall, Suffolk, April 2008) gives each musician plenty of space, allowing a fine balance between the instruments of this notoriously tricky combination. But what matters is the music; and any group that is willing to take it seriously is guaranteed to reap the dividends. Personal favourites in the *Gypsy Rondo* include Trio Fontenay and the Vienna Piano Trio (not least for the wonderfully subtle pianism of Stefan Mendl); all four of these trios are also recorded in performances of 'unimpeachable interpretative acumen' (Nalen Anthoni) by the Florestan Trio. The Kungsbackas need fear nothing in comparison. **David Threasher**

*Selected comparison – coupled as above:*

Florestan Trio (4/09, 1/10) (HYPE) CDA67719; CDA67757

'Gypsy Rondo' Trio – selected comparisons:

Trio Fontenay (2/99\*) (WCT) 2564 69650-3

Vienna Pf Trio (2/99) (NIMB) NI5535

## Holmboe

'Chamber Music, Vol 1'

Primavera, Op 55. Trio 'Gioco', Op 155. Solo Flute Sonata, Op 71. Ballata, Op 159. Flute Quartet, Op 90

**Ensemble MidtVest**

Dacapo © 8 226073 (72' • DDD)



### Holmboe performed by his Danish compatriots

After its fine string quartets cycle with the Kontra Quartet, Dacapo is evidently turning its attention to the substantial body of Holmboe's remaining chamber music. This first volume gives us five representative samples spanning more than 30 years, from the genial and somewhat Nielsenesque *Primavera* for flute with piano trio of 1951 to the altogether grittier *Gioco* for string trio and *Ballata* for piano quartet (1983 and 1984 respectively).

As with all Holmboe's music, there are rewards in store for anyone who delights in following lines of pure musical thought. Nothing is gratuitous or extraneous; nor can the musical character ever be completely taken for granted. In *Primavera*, the austere central

slow movement touches unexpected depths, while in the late works, hints of humour flash across the spiky surfaces. In all such cases, Shostakovich comes to mind as a kindred spirit.

At times one might suspect that compositional resourcefulness has become the be-all-and-end-all, at the expense of more urgent communicative values. The Sonata for solo flute is no doubt a good workout for the player but remains a rather arid experience for the listener. However, the Quartetto for flute and string trio proves once again that musical conversation is Holmboe's strong point, as it is for the excellent players on this cleanly recorded disc.

David Fanning

## MacMillan

*After the Tryst*<sup>ac</sup>. *A Different World*<sup>ac</sup>.

*Fourteen Little Pictures*<sup>abc</sup>. *In angustii* – I<sup>a</sup>; II<sup>a</sup>.

*Kiss on Wood*<sup>ac</sup>. *Walfrid*, on his Arrival at the Gates of Paradise<sup>c</sup>. 25th May 1967<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Gregory Harrington *vn* <sup>b</sup>Caroline Stinson *vc*

<sup>c</sup>Simon Mulligan *pf*

Estile © 391651 (64' • DDD)



### A compendium of pared-down MacMillan

Although he has achieved considerable success through his large-scale works, James MacMillan often seems more focused when writing on a smaller or more restricted scale. This disc gathers a number of such pieces from over a quarter-century: violin and piano combining in the eloquent *Kiss on Wood* (1994), followed by the quixotic interplay of *After the Tryst* (1988) and then the increasingly troubled ecstasy of *A Different World* (1995). Its centrepiece comes with *Fourteen Little Pictures* (1997) – inherently abstract evocations unfolding continuously, during which the piano trio formation is deployed in a number of imaginative and increasingly impassioned contexts. After which, the three pieces for solo piano might risk seeming anti-climactic, though the piquant 'aria and reel' that is *Walfrid* (2008) feels the more affecting for its brevity, while *25th May 1967* (2002) recalls Celtic's European Cup win with uninhibited verve. The earlier of the two *In angustii* pieces (both 2001) commemorates 9/11 in austere speculative terms, on which the solo violin arrangement of its successor elaborates so that the underlying mood, while remaining subdued, takes on a more acute melancholy.

Most of these pieces have been recorded – notably the main work on a disc of the composer's chamber music, and those for violin and piano on a wide-ranging recital by Madeleine Mitchell and Andrew Ball – but having them collated enhances their contrasts and similarities, as well as pointing up the



diversity within their overall idiom. Committed performances and immediate sound reinforce that, for MacMillan, less really can be more. **Richard Whitehouse**

*Fourteen Little Pictures – selected comparison:*

*Thorsen, Watkins, Brown (1/01) (BKBO) BBM1008*

*Kiss on Wood, A Different World – selected comparison:*

*Mitchell, Ball (7/05) (NMC) NMCD098*

## R Reynolds

**Sanctuary** (studio performance and two live performances)

**Steven Schick** *perc* **red fish blue fish**

Mode MODE232/3 (3h 21' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo & DTS 5.1 • O)

Includes 'Finding Sanctuary: Roger Reynolds Making Modern Music', a documentary on the composer.

Live performances: National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; excerpts from an outdoor sunset performance at the Salk Institute, La Jolla, CA



Reynolds's new musical language live on DVD

For those of us with the polyrhythmic landfall of free jazz drummers like Andrew Cyrille and Sunny Murray – the man who played the law of relativity – surging through our imaginations, notated music for 'classical' percussionists invariably disappoints. The resulting sonic boom of a struck ride cymbal resonates beyond anyone's control; the sound doesn't know it's been written down, but we do.

As Cornelius Cardew put it, 'the notation should do it', and California-based composer Roger Reynolds succeeds where most composers fail: he has devised a notational system for percussion that allows him, as composer, to fix parameters and structures while allowing sound to retain its autonomy. *Sanctuary* is in three sections. The first movement, 'Chatter/Clatter', is for a solo percussionist, the excellent Steven Schick, who uses his fingers to scuttle over, shake and tap percussion instruments (including gongs and a woodblock, also a beer bottle and small box) laid out over a tabletop. The second and third movements ('Oracle' and 'Song') move this conversation between sound and fingers to a percussion quartet.

And this is how Reynolds's notation triumphs. Schick fingers each gesture with targeted precision and delicacy, like phrasing the chromatic tumble of a Schubert slow movement. Percussion-writing tends towards grand, splashy pomp; instead Reynolds diverts what he calls 'the choreography of motion' normally used by percussionists to produce a sound into a base material that is open for development. Now no longer an instinctive technique deployed to realise generic percussion gestures, Reynolds goes right inside sound. I could fill a whole issue of

*Gramophone* with the nuances of how *Sanctuary* evolves from here, but the gist is that the melodic archetypes Reynolds sketches out during his opening movement blossom in the second and third movements. Real-time electronics listen in and add commentaries, then harmony like you never did hear materialises on tuned almglocken cowbells in the final moments. Here's the most outstandingly original view of percussion since Varèse's *Ionisation*.

All those composers – James MacMillan, Joseph Schwantner, Jennifer Higdon – who have grafted percussion concertos over cod-Romantic emoting, confusing effect with content, need to think again. Your music is the wrong way round.

**Philip Clark**

## Saint-Saëns

Cello Sonata No 1, Op 32<sup>a</sup>. Suite, Op 90.

Allegro appassionato – Op 43<sup>a</sup>. Op 70.

Mazurka, Op 21. Album, Op 72 – No 2, Carillon.

Etudes, Op 52 – No 6, En forme de valse

<sup>a</sup>**Christina Shillito** *vc* **Christine Croshaw** *pf*

Meridian CDE84433 (62' • DDD)



Surprisingly complex Saint-Saëns for cello

Although in his day Saint-Saëns was regarded by the French as one of their greatest composers, today we are inclined to regard him as lightweight. Nevertheless, the opening piano work on this first-class collection, the Op 70 Allegro appassionato, is quite captivating, played by Christine Croshaw with the lightest touch. But it is also by no means insubstantial, and the following Mazurka, Op 21, is worthy of Chopin. The four-movement Suite then looks back affectionately at the Baroque era. After its arrestingly strong Prelude and Fugue, its three dance movements (Menuet, Gavotte and Gigue) have an appealing melodic elegance, with the *spiccato* closing Gigue played with an infectious rhythmic bounce.

Croshaw is a first-rate artist, as her musical characterisation fully demonstrates, and is perfectly balanced in the First Cello Sonata with her partner Christina Shillito, who favours a comparatively restrained lyricism. The underlying *moto perpetuo* effect of the engaging central *Andante* is subtly managed, followed by a quicksilver finale, and the vigorous B minor Allegro appassionato then gives the cellist a chance to boldly show her paces and here she dominates in just the right way.

Excellent recording throughout ensures that altogether this is a most rewarding duet-recital.

**Ivan March**

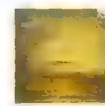
## Schubert

String Quintet, D956<sup>a</sup>.

Quartettssatz, D703 (with Andante fragment)

**Tokyo Quartet** with <sup>a</sup>**David Watkin** *vc*

Harmonia Mundi HMU80 7427 (66' • DDD/DSD)



Standard repertoire with the rules rewritten

From tempestuousness to rumination and all things in between; it's a palette of feelings that requires to be confronted in Schubert's Quintet. The Tokyo String Quartet with David Watkin promise much as they traverse the slow harmonic progression that opens the first movement, dynamic shifts expertly weighed, SACD recording spaciouly lifelike. And there is nothing to criticise about the performance of this movement, forcefully authoritative yet accommodatingly contrasted where necessary, as in the second subject. The exposition repeat has the last chord omitted the second time round. It's an interpretative decision (the autograph is lost) that has a ring of certitude, as does the finale, where the group respond to a kaleidoscope of changes – first and second subjects separately developed, passages of whispered beauty, increasing tempi at the end that seem like a rush to destruction – with unflustered command.

They finish as impressively as they begin; but the middle movements arouse reservations. Loud *pizzicatos* from the second cello don't initiate an atmospheric *Adagio* where each instrument is specifically marked *pianissimo*. A degree of objectivity throughout weakens the reach to Elysium – individually achieved by The Lindsays (ASV, 9/85 – nla) and the Belcea Quartet – and tames the neurotic paroxysm that tears through the central section. The Tokyo stand back, refusing the minatory experience. More seriously, these musicians tamper with the *Scherzo*, choosing to play the second part complete only when repeated; and 'edit' the Trio with damaging consequences. Whatever their reasons were, these actions belittle the music. Shame: expectations were very high. **Nalen Anthoni**

D956 – selected comparison:

*Belcea Qt, Erben (12/09) (EMI) 967025-2*

## Schumann

Three String Quartets, Op 41. Piano Quintet, Op 44<sup>a</sup>

**Gringolts Quartet**; <sup>a</sup>**Peter Laul** *pf*

Onyx ONYX4081 (108' • DDD)



More Schumann quartets, hard on the Doric's heels

Mere weeks after the Doric's Op 41 comes another new set of Schumann's miraculous quartets, this time coupled with the Piano Quintet. The Gringolts Quartet is a relatively new phenomenon, having formed in 2008.

These four fine players are consistently musical in their approach and there is nothing outlandish or suspect about their interpretations. And therein perhaps lies their weakness, for it's precisely that degree of risk-taking that makes this music come alive. It's a risky strategy of course, but it's there in abundance in both the Doric's and the Zehetmair's readings, and that's what makes them so convincing. The Gringolts Quartet are less extreme – their slow movements faster, their fast ones steadier. It means that a movement such as the *Scherzo* of No 1 is heavier, with Mendelssohn – such a potent point of reference in the Doric's reading – here banished; the coda to the finale of No 2, while still exciting, doesn't have that edge-of-madness to it that you find in the Doric. There's also more sense of four distinct personalities at work in the Doric, notably in moments such as the ravishing cello-violin duet in the *Adagio* of the First. There is elegance to the new reading, though, which can be persuasive, such as in the variation-form second movement of No 2, though the close recording has caught what sounds like intakes of breath, which may prove distracting for some listeners.

For the Quintet the Gringolts are joined by Peter Laul, who makes light of the fiendish piano-writing. They set off at a purposeful tempo and ironically it's here that you experience the quartet members showing more individuality. The fast movements generally come off best here – though in the *Scherzo* it's hard to match the fingery brilliance of either Marc-André Hamelin or Leif Ove Andsnes; while Argerich leads a joyous dance in the finale, edging towards mania in her propulsion. It's in the slow movement that doubts arise again with this new recording: momentum is in short supply, despite the fact that the players are less daringly slow than the Takács/Hamelin reading. **Harriet Smith**

*Qts Nos 1–3 – selected comparison:*

*Doric Qt (12/11) (CHAN) CHAN10692*

*Qts Nos 1 & 3 – selected comparison:*

*Zehetmair Qt (6/03) (ECM) 472 169-2*

*Qt No 3, Pf Qnt – selected comparison:*

*Takács Qt (11/09) (HYPER) CDA67631*

*Pf Qnt – selected comparisons:*

*Argerich, Schwarzbach, Hall, Imai, Maisky*

(1/96, A/02) (EMI) 557308-2

*Artemis Qt, Andsnes (A/07) (VIRG) 395143-2*

## E Schwartz

String Quartet No 2, 'For Lousie and Aaron'.

Summer's Journey<sup>b</sup>. Darwin's Dream<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Borromeo Quartet; <sup>b</sup>electronic collage chamber;

<sup>c</sup>Ithaca College Wind Ensemble / Stephen Peterson

Albany © TROY1266 (59' • DDD)



12-tone row from Copland's deathbed lives on in Schwartz

Schwartz's Second String Quartet is a tribute to the sculptor Louise Nevelson and to Aaron Copland. He has paired them because they both came to the US from Russian Jewish immigrant families and were born and died within a year of each other. But Schwartz also found that Nevelson's technique was comparable to his own use of fragments, including quotation. She became internationally famous in the 1960s for abstract wooden assemblages in compartments containing familiar objects in a single colour. The Copland connection is a note-row from late sketches and a piano piece published in 1972 as *In Evening Air*. These two sources have proved particularly rich in prompting Schwartz's deftly ventilated textures, ranging from single instruments to spoken texts including 'I have never liked the middle ground – the most boring place in the world'.

Schwartz is not in the middle ground, although *Summer's Journey* for wind ensemble contains translucent triads as a reminder that he wrote a book on Vaughan Williams's symphonies. *Summer's Journey* was commissioned jointly by 19 wind ensemble directors who must have got what they wanted in this resourceful two-movement piece. Like the Quartet, it's a live performance – but this time with applause.

The collage piece *Darwin's Dream* arose because the artist Dorothy Schwartz, the composer's wife, had an exhibition of her prints and drawings inspired by Charles Darwin. There's a unifying catchy synthesiser tune and bits of three pieces from Schumann's *Scenes from Childhood* because Mrs Darwin might have played them. Schwartz pioneered electronic music – he wrote a Listener's Guide – and *Darwin's Dream* is one of the most entertaining and consistently fascinating pieces in this medium. **Peter Dickinson**

## Tveitt

Frå ei reisedagbok (From a Travel Diary).

Husguden (The Household God), Op 184.

Septet. Jonsokkvelden (Midsummer's Eve)

**Fragaria Vesca**

Simax © PSC1222 (49' • DDD)



Chamber music by a maverick Norwegian pianist-composer. Hitherto, recordings of Geirr Tveitt's music have focused on his orchestral suites (12/94, 8/99, 6/01, 7/01, 4/02, 9/04) and piano music (3/98, 8/98), so this chamber programme is most welcome. The composer indicated that he wrote at least two string quartets, a quartet for four violins, two – possibly three – string sextets plus a concerto for string quartet and orchestra, and a ballet, *Husguden* ('The Household God'), for an octet of flute,

oboe, horn, harp and string quartet. Most of these were destroyed in the now infamous house fire in July 1970 that destroyed so much of his output.

Fragaria Vesca, a 'flexible chamber music ensemble' formed in 2006, open with one of the quartets, an eight-movement suite titled *Frå ei reisedagbok* ('From a Travel Diary'). It is unclear which, since Tveitt suggested both quartets dated from the 1930s, but this Travel Diary, designated variously as No 1 and Op 5, depicts places around the Mediterranean – including the Via Appia, Tripoli, El Escorial and Seville – visited only years later, and results in a beautifully wrought Romantic work (harmonically 20th- rather than 19th-century). The other large piece, the 16-minute folk-ballet in 12 brief scenes *Husguden* (1956) is very different in atmosphere.

Both works receive very neat performances, although the recordings are close-miked and a touch claustrophobic. The two fillers are scored for a septet of string quartet, double bass, oboe or cor anglais and horn, and are based on two of Tveitt's songs. In these guises they have a galumphing charm, as if being danced to by a troupe of infant pachyderms.

**Guy Rickards**

## C Wolff

'Kompositionen 1950-72'

For Pianist (three versions<sup>a, b</sup>). Duo for Violinist and Pianist<sup>c</sup>. Lines for String Quartet<sup>c</sup>. For Prepared Piano<sup>d</sup>. For Piano I (two versions<sup>a, b</sup>). For 1, 2 or 3 People (two versions<sup>d, f</sup>). Edges (two versions<sup>a, i</sup>).

Drinks<sup>g</sup>. Prose Collection - Stones<sup>g</sup>. Suite I for Prepared Piano (two versions<sup>h, k</sup>). Duo for Violins<sup>j</sup>

<sup>b</sup>János Négyesy, <sup>b</sup>Biliana Voutchkova, <sup>b</sup>Daniella

Strasfogel vns <sup>b</sup>Keith Rowe gtr <sup>a</sup>Frederic Rzewski,

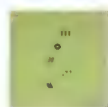
<sup>b</sup>Cornelius Cardew, <sup>b</sup>Fuat Kent pfs <sup>b</sup>David Tudor

<sup>k</sup>pfA org <sup>c</sup>Italian Chamber Society; <sup>e</sup>Gentle Fire;

<sup>i</sup>Nelly Boyd; <sup>g</sup>Society for New Music of the Leiniger

State Gymnasium, Grünstadt

Edition RZ © 2 1023/4 (159' • ADD)



Christian Wolff's early works recorded as they were written

That the word 'investigation' is never far away from the surface of Wolff's writings is no coincidence, and this Edition RZ anthology of long-lost and hitherto deleted Wolff recordings opens with a characteristic call-to-action. *Duo for Violinist and Pianist* (1961) is not, you'll notice, a more passive 'Duo for Violin and Piano'. Performed by János Négyesy (violin) and Cornelius Cardew (piano), the set-up is cued up like a relay race: one player starts and must sustain his gesture until the other musician enters with a new sound; at the end an existentialist Beckettian paradox emerges as the rules say neither player can stop until the other makes their



'final' sound. Being music, though, Godot eventually must show.

Encouraging musicians to become socially responsible for their sounds by listening is Wolff's key concern. Négyses and Cardew navigate without structural props and recurring landmarks. Passing time is suspended; space opens in which to place each sound carefully. *For Pianist* (not 'For Piano'!) is another open-plan score and hearing three performances – David Tudor, then two versions by Frederic Rzewski – presses the point that indeterminate scores need to be interpreted like anything else. Tudor demonstrates the material; Rzewski constructs internal dialogues, thinks it into a piece.

When Wolff's concerns are transferred to a larger group, the results accumulate. *Edges*, realised by the improvisation troupe Gentle Fire, which included Richard Bernas, is fantastically disorientating; the text scores *Stone* and *Drinks*, conceived for Cardew's Scratch Orchestra, deal up deeper mysteries. The structures are again inscrutable but the familiarity of the sounds – water being poured, drunk, gargled – makes the scenario more enigmatic; reality once removed. If Cage and Feldman were the New York School's rock-star personalities, Wolff is its George Harrison – the introverted, slightly unfathomable one. **Philip Clark**

## Zemlinsky

String Quartets – No 2, Op 15; No 4, Op 25.

Two Movements

Zemlinsky Quartet

Praga Digitals (F) PRD/DSD250 277 (75' • DDD/DSD)



Zemlinsky's chamber music with flashes of the theatre

Zemlinsky is one of those composers of not quite the first rank whose reputation continues to be overshadowed by his more illustrious contemporaries, although Schoenberg acknowledged his older friend as a forward-looking composer for the theatre; Berg (to whom he was perhaps closest) dedicated the *Lyric Suite* to him and quoted Zemlinsky's *Lyric Symphony* in it; and Webern paid tribute to the chamber music in particular, the domain in which all these free-thinking spirits felt challenged to prove their allegiance to tradition from time to time.

Webern characterised the evolution of Zemlinsky's four quartets by giving an epithet to each: No 1 was 'Departure' (in the sense of a moving away from Brahms's influence); No 2 'The Turning Point' (*Wende*); and No 4 'Mask Game' (*Maskenspiel*). No 4, completed in 1936, was a 'tombeau' for the recently departed Berg; unpublished and unperformed until 1967, a quarter of a century after Zemlinsky's death, one wonders again at the

indifference Vienna has so often displayed towards her distinguished sons. It was the LaSalle Quartet who took it up and this excellent namesake ensemble studied with their leader, Walter Levin.

The other two numbered Quartets came out on Praga Digitals nearly five years ago (12/07). If you enjoy swimming in these waters you'll probably be glad to have both discs. Zemlinsky's writing shows him as a restless spirit but moving with the times and interested in what others are doing – Bartók and Hindemith are nodded to at a distance. No 2, playing continuously for nearly 40 minutes, would not have the scale and ambition it does without the example of Schoenberg's No 1, even though the harmonic language stays closer to Mahler's. Its flux of continuous variation on a single motto, without obvious repetition, asks a lot of any listener. More personal and fully achieved is No 4, where a suite of six self-contained movements, in contrasted pairs, with common thematic elements, underlines the closeness of the homage to Berg. The shadow of Mahler remains here, and notwithstanding elements of the burlesque and the sardonic, you feel that it's through his lyrical temperament that Zemlinsky most convincingly identifies himself. **Stephen Plaistow**

## Trio Panta Rhei

Bernstein Symphonic Dances from West Side

Story Gershwin/Frolov Concert Fantasy on

Themes from Porgy and Bess, Op 19 Kapustin

Piano Trio, Op 86 Pritsker Everything Profound – II

Schnyder Worlds Beyond

Trio Panta Rhei

Ars Produktion (F) ARS38097 (79' • DDD/DSD)



Ensemble from Cologne in trios from America

Another month, another chamber *West Side Story*. In the December issue of *Gramophone* I reviewed the Labèque Sisters' performance of the transcription Irwin Kostal arranged for the four-handed sorority, but despite Kostal's eminence as Bernstein's original orchestrator, concluded that *West Side Story* and chamber forces are ultimately irreconcilable.

Trio Panta Rhei make even heavier weather of their boiled-down Symphonic Dances. Gudrun Pagel finds the melodic contours of 'Somewhere' tailor-made for a violinist but the trio fall into deep trouble during those numbers where big-band physicality and a jazz idiom come as standard. Julia Vaisberg's piano-playing is appropriately gnarly but the strings lack precision enough to carry the 'Prologue', while 'Mambo' and especially the fugue from 'Cool' fall victim to some gruesomely acid intonation and feeble rhythmic attack. And whoever reckoned dropping bits of 'America'

into 'The Rumble' as flashbacks was a good idea ought to be dragged down the station house by Officer Krupke.

Their *Porgy and Bess*, although not entirely free from iffy intonation, nails the dramatic trajectory of Igor Frolov's paraphrase rather well, but the other works disappoint. Daniel Schnyder's *Worlds Beyond* and Nikolai Kapustin's Trio tinker boringly with jazz licks; Gene Pritsker's *Everything Profound* is built on stock light-music sequences. Pritsker says in his programme-note that 'all music is good music as long as it is played well'. Just thought I'd quote that and leave the inference hanging. **Philip Clark**

## 'Virtuoso Baroque'

JS Bach Sonata, BWV1033 Corelli La folia, Op 5

No 12 Handel Sonata, HWV377 Tartini Sonata,

'Devil's Trill' Telemann Sonata, TWV41:d4 Vitali

Chaconne Vivaldi/Chédeville Sonata, RV59

Michala Petri rec Lars Hannibal gtr

OUR Recordings (F) 6 220604 (68' • DDD)



Husband and wife in Baroque recorder exposé

There can be little doubt that if any recorder player has the right to give their CD the title 'Virtuoso Baroque', it is Michala Petri. Here she proves her fitness by wading into three technique-bending warhorses from the violin repertoire – the Vitali Chaconne, Corelli's 'Folia' Variations and Tartini's *Devil's Trill* Sonata – and emerges the other side with scarcely a ruffle. In music both fast and slow her poise remains absolute thanks to lightning fingerwork, precision tonguing, faultless breath control and unfailing evenness of tone and tuning. There must be few recorder players anywhere who can match this, and the cool-handed athleticism is no less impressive in some of the actual wind pieces included here in the form of sonatas by Telemann, Bach, Chédeville and Handel. At its best, the sheer sound of Petri's playing can shoot a thrill through you like an iced drink on a hot day.

But this, of course, is precisely where the reservations creep in, because for all the attention to detail, stylish command of line and tasteful ornamentation, there are times when the final sparks of excitement and human warmth are missing. The Corelli is disappointingly reserved, the Tartini finale lacks dramatic power, and the 'Pastorale' of the Chédeville needs more drowsy atmosphere. Lars Hannibal's solid but unremarkable accompaniments do not help a great deal. Listen to this CD and you will gape in wonder at Petri's technical brilliance, but in the end you may find at a deeper level that the music has left you strangely unmoved. **Lindsay Kemp**

# Instrumental



**Bryce Morrison reviews  
Pollini's 'first' Chopin Etudes:**

*'What awe-inspiring assurance and uncanny technical perfection in the treacherous double notes of No 7'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 62**



**Philip Clark reviews piano  
works by Edward Cowie:**

*'The music plays hypnagogic sleights-of-hand with flurries of notes and their reflections in emerging resonant spaces'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 63**

## CPE Bach • Britten

'Liaisons, Vol 3'

**CPE Bach** Keyboard Sonatas – Wq65/42 H189; Wq69 H53. Fantasia, Wq117/14. La Böhmer (Murky), Wq117/26 **Britten** Five Waltzes, Op 3. Holiday Diary, Op 5. Night-Piece (Notturmo)

**Dejan Lazic** *pf*

Channel Classics © CCSSA28511 (69' • DDD/DSD)



**Lazic's third pairing is a  
liaison across two centuries**

The Croatian pianist is building up a valuable discography with Channel Classics, each new release characterised by unconventional programming and consistently winning performances. Anyone who has the nerve to transform Brahms's Violin Concerto into an astonishingly convincing piano concerto must be a special talent. This is Vol 3 of Lazic's series entitled 'Liaisons' – unexpected pairings of composers who we might not necessarily expect to have much in common, Vol 1 of Scarlatti and Bartók being a case in point, Vol 2 of Schumann and Brahms less so. CPE Bach and Britten? I don't think it bears close scrutiny – I could justify juxtaposing Mozart with Moszkowski by some sophistry but I'm not sure who it would benefit – but, eating my hat, Lazic's unpredictable union works surprisingly well. His feather-light despatch of the D minor Sonata's last-movement variations almost melts into the first of Britten's early Five Waltzes (1925, rev 1969, and issued, understandably, with the composer's apology).

After two short Bach pieces (one of which, *La Böhmer*, is a *prestissimo* whirlwind derived from Scarlatti and prescient of Haydn) comes *Holiday Diary* (1934). What a difference a decade made, underlined by Lazic's deft, acutely observed reading (up there with Stephen Hough's – EMI), making you regret that Britten wrote so little for solo piano. 'Fun-Fair' (No 3) shares something of CPE's quirky impulsiveness and a delight in exuberant keyboard athletics, encountered again in Bach's E flat Sonata, Wq65/42. Britten's *Night-Piece*, his last work for piano, written in 1963 as a test piece for the Leeds Competition, brings the programme to a barely audible conclusion. **Jeremy Nicholas**

## JS Bach

**JS Bach** Goldberg Variations, BWV988.

Fourteen Canons, BWV1087 *Stölzel* Bist du bei mir (from the *Clavier-Büchlein für Anna Magdalena* Bach)

**Daniel-Ben Pienaar** *pf*

Avie © AV2235 (57' • DDD)



**RAM professor Pienaar follows  
Mozart sonatas with Goldbergs**

Daniel-Ben Pienaar, a professor at the Royal Academy of Music, produced a set of Mozart sonatas not so long ago (2/11) that divided critics. Tempi were fast and articulation sharp. Some were utterly convinced by the dexterity and boldly etched lines, others found the style aggressive.

His new disc of the *Goldberg Variations* will probably not bring the camps to accord. By avoiding repeats and opting for fleet tempi, Pienaar produces a breathless, highly energised reading, and has room at the end of the cycle to include the 14 Canons on the bass of the *Goldberg* aria (BWV1087) and a sweet reading of Bach's setting of the aria 'Bist du bei mir', included in part because it is linked to the *Goldberg* theme by inclusion in the *Notebook for Anna Magdalena* Bach.

These extras elicit some of Pienaar's finest playing, and it's disconcerting but in the end satisfying to hear the canons, discovered in 1974, added to the cycle as if they constitute a final, deconstructive commentary on the larger corpus of the *Goldbergs* to which they are ambiguously related. But the speed with which the variations themselves are dispatched, which makes room for this addendum, comes at significant cost to the interpretation.

In his well-argued booklet-notes, Pienaar points out that hearing the *Goldbergs* as a single-sitting concert work is anachronistic, and that efforts to 'invoke "structure" in isolation, or prior to, or as superior to the experiential' likely lead to dry and soulless performances. His command of line and clarity of contrapuntal playing leave nothing wanting in the structure department. But he does seem intent on producing a reading that might work better heard live than it does under the more rigorous scrutiny of recording.

The exaggerated dotting of rhythms in Var 7 are charming the first time but feel mannered on the second. The demi-semiquaver flourishes in the next variation come across as almost frantic rather than ornamental. In Var 14, the descending pattern of rapid mordant-like figures sounds too clipped and percussive with repeated hearing.

There is, nevertheless, much to like, from feathery trills in the serenely rendered aria to the more expansive and meditative effect of the slower variations. It's enough to make one wonder if Pienaar is, like so many artists, over-compensating for a perceived weakness that is in fact his greatest strength. This would certainly be a stronger recording if he allowed himself greater indulgence as the inward, intellectual and formally rigorous player he so clearly is. **Philip Kennicott**

## JS Bach

Six Trio Sonatas, BWV525-30

**Robert Quinney** *org*

Coro © COR16095 (79' • DDD)

Played on the Frobenius organ of The Queen's College, Oxford



**Westminster Abbey organist  
in Bach's testing trio sonatas**

The Coro label, home of The Sixteen, has diversified into a series of Bach organ recordings, played by its principal organist (and sub-organist of Westminster Abbey) Robert Quinney. His starting point is surely the pinnacle of the organist's repertory, the Six Trio Sonatas, which are thought to date from the early 1730s and were intended as organ teaching pieces for Bach's son Wilhelm Friedemann. The technical challenges are immense, requiring independent control of four limbs (and at least two brains!). Needless to say, Quinney delivers finger- and foot-perfect performances.

Four of the sonatas are built upon the same fast-slow-fast Italianate trio sonata groundplan. Bach weaves a deeply satisfying and elaborate three-part texture, full of imitative counterpoint. With the exception of the Third and Fourth sonatas (which are marked at more moderate tempi), Quinney



PHOTOGRAPHY: ERIC RICHMOND



Four limbs and two brains: Robert Quinney dazzles in Bach's organ trio sonatas

projects the first movements with a light touch, allowing their intricate, tuneful beauty to shine brightly. His slow movements are achingly eloquent, for example in the middle movement of the Third Sonata (marked *Adagio e dolce*), where the unforced tone of two matching eight-foot flute stops (one with a gentle tremulant) is a delight. Final movements are consistently sparkling and fresh, making the fullest use of the comparatively modest colours of the 22-stop 1965 Frobenius in The Queen's College, Oxford.

With all the repeats observed, this makes for a very full disc but one which is highly satisfying. How fitting, too, that it is dedicated to the much-lamented David Sanger, an inspiring teacher to so many organists. **Malcolm Riley**

## Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 5, Op 10 No 1; No 11, Op 22; No 12, Op 26; No 26, 'Les adieux', Op 81a

Jonathan Biss *pf*

Onyx © ONYX4082 (74' • DDD)



**Former EMI pianist starts a Beethoven cycle on Onyx**

Jonathan Biss begins Beethoven's Op 10 No 1 Sonata's first movement by ever so slightly elongating and slowing down phrases, and creates a similarly mannered impression when

he tapers the second subject to the point where the accompaniment nearly overpowers the melody. By contrast, his fundamentalist approach to the *Prestissimo* finale defines relentless bravura and could use a little bit more punctuation and breathing room, but he finds his centre with a lyrically sustained and eloquent *Adagio molto*.

Biss projects the lightness and wit of Op 22's *Allegro con brio* as crisply as Richard Goode and Wilhelm Kempff but the end results are a shade too square when heard alongside Paul Lewis's more incisive, dynamically contrasted traversal (Harmonia Mundi, 12/06), while Biss's clear-cut *Allegretto* yields to Kovacevich's more direct and tonally translucent reading (EMI, 9/98). In Op 26, it's a toss-up between Biss's refreshingly animated way with the *Andante con variazioni* and Angela Hewitt's seamless tempo relationships and more differentiated articulation (Hyperion, 9/10). But Biss's linear contouring and razor-sharp touch in the *Scherzo* leave Lewis's dainty deliberation at the starting gate.

If Biss is too reserved and small-scale in the Funeral March compared to the sterner, bleaker Hewitt and Richter, his subtle accentuations give voice to the finale's part-writing and cross-rhythmic nature. The dynamism and sweep that enliven *Les adieux*'s outer movements in the hands of Solomon, Schnabel and (more recently) Nelson Freire overshadow Biss's comparably brisk but more

cautious fingerwork. Audiences seem to inspire more dangerous and no less technically assured Beethoven-playing from Biss; perhaps a live concert would be a better context for Onyx to continue cultivating their Biss/Beethoven merger. **Jed Distler**

## Beethoven - Liszt

'Perspectives 5'

**Beethoven** Piano Sonata No 29, 'Hammerklavier', Op 106 **Liszt** *Années de pèlerinage* – Année 1, 'Suisse', S160

Andreas Haefliger *pf*

Avie © 2 AV2239 (101' • DDD)



**Volume 5 of Haefliger's 'Perspectives' series**

Andreas Haefliger's 'Perspectives' series has been a model of thoughtful and occasionally provocative programme-building. This fifth instalment leans more towards provocation. You get a heavy, unbalanced 100-minute musical meal when you juxtapose Beethoven's heaven-storming and cumulatively fulfilling *Hammerklavier* Sonata with Liszt's musically disparate and uneven *Années de pèlerinage* Book 1, especially when served up by as suave and solid yet not so consistently engaged an artist.

Given the passion and drama that Haefliger brought to Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata (6/08), I find the *Hammerklavier*'s first



PHOTOGRAPHY: IMAGNO/BARBARA PFLAUM

Maurizio Pollini, photographed in Vienna in 1966

movement too soft around the edges and lacking in forward momentum, replete with sectional *ritards* that sound more generic than purposeful: one case in point is the climactic build-up before the recapitulation in alternating fifths and sixths, where Haeffliger opts for the 'safe' A natural reading that Kempff, Brendel and Lewis favour, rather than the 'dangerous' A sharp option observed by Rosen, Arrau, Schnabel and Solomon.

A few fussy tempo adjustments in the *Scherzo* can be forgiven in light of Haeffliger's linear clarity, and despite his dynamic inhibitions in the great *Adagio sostenuto*, the pianist bravely honours the composer's exposed left-hand rests in the accompaniments while spinning out the increasingly elaborate right-hand cantilenas with numerous *legato* shadings and ultra-discreet pedalling. What the fugal finale lacks in inner urgency and combative temperament, Haeffliger more than makes up for in linear interplay and a left hand more to the fore than usual.

Liszt's Swiss journey gets off to a fine start, as Haeffliger takes trouble to give shape and meaning to *Chapelle de Guillaume Tell*'s tremolos and uses his pedalling mastery to convincingly project the composer's request for vibrato. However, the choppy accompanimental water filling *Au lac de Wallenstadt* is not quite up to Liszt's *dolcissimo* *egualmente* specification. While *Pastorale*'s

dynamics are generally too loud, at least Haeffliger's tempo approximates a real *vivace* (Bolet, for example, is impossibly slow), and his slight slowing down for the *un poco marcato* sections provides characterful contrast to what came before. Haeffliger's fidgety tempo fluctuations throughout *Vallée d'Obermann* obscure the impact of those marked by Liszt (Arrau's steadier patience pays off to stronger dramatic effect). The final two pieces clock in slower than most pianists, yet are expressive and well sustained. Avie's engineering captures Haeffliger's piano and the 1200-seat La Chaux-de-Fonds' gorgeous acoustics to perfection. **Jed Distler**

## Chopin

Etudes - Op 10; Op 25

Maurizio Pollini *pf*

Testament ® SBT1473 (60' • ADD)

Recorded 1960



### First publication for the Etudes Pollini didn't like

Here, remarkably, are Maurizio Pollini's first thoughts on the Chopin Etudes. Recorded by EMI in 1960, the genesis of this disc is outlined by Tony Locantore in his accompanying essay, where he tells of an increasingly fraught situation. Even when the easy majority of great artists (Lipatti, Ashkenazy, Brendel, Larrocha and Gérard Souzay come to mind) are often

dismissive of their earliest recorded efforts, it is surely astonishing that Pollini could reject his early superfine brilliance, his aristocratic musicianship, his patrician ideal in the Chopin Etudes. Yet his rejection was adamant. Later his switching of producer, piano and location became too much for the EMI team and, as their initial anxiety to accommodate their highly strung 18-year-old virtuoso waned, he left them for DG, his preferred company to this day.

Yet here, rescued by Testament, is a poetic intensity in the slower Etudes (most notably in the desolating Op 10 No 6) that later eluded him in his more objective DG recording. What superb articulation in, say, Op 10 Nos 2, 4 and 5, and what awe-inspiring assurance and uncanny technical perfection in the treacherous double notes of No 7 (Chopin's Toccata if you like). His pedalling is light, his sonority 'white' and crystalline, and if there is little of Cortot's careless rapture or Cherkassky's elfin propensity for mischief-making there is, overall, a near flawless balance of sense and sensibility. All lovers of great piano-playing will need to add this to their collection together with later Pollini, early Ashkenazy, Cortot and, most recently, Perahia. The recording captures much of Pollini's pristine sound and there are sensible gaps between each Etude, allowing the listener to recover his breath before the start of the next marvel. **Bryce Morrison**



## Chopin • Sudbin

**Chopin** Ballades – No 3, Op 47; No 4, Op 52. Fantasie, Op 49. Mazurkas – No 7, Op 7 No 3; No 17, Op 24 No 4; No 23, Op 33 No 2; No 25, Op 33 No 4; No 32, Op 50 No 3. Nocturnes – No 7, Op 27 No 1; No 13, Op 48 No 1; No 16, Op 55 No 2 **Sudbin** A la minute

**Yevgeny Sudbin** *pf*

BIS (P) BIS-SACD1838 (70' • DDD/DSD)



### Sudbin's Chopin selection with a personal twist

'I will show that it is quite possible to give a piano recital without Chopin.' This bald and combative statement comes from Prokofiev, determined to break with tradition and also, just possibly, fearful of what Yevgeny Sudbin calls in his intriguing and speculative notes 'a tough balancing act on a tightrope'. There he speaks of that fine line between Chopin's Classical and Romantic bias, between Slavonic passion and Gallic precision.

And, hoist with his own petard, I have to say that he is hardly the first pianist to sound inhibited by Chopin's always elusive genius; a subtle alchemy very different to the more extreme Romanticism of Schumann and Liszt. Fluent, sensitive and civilised, he is overly discreet, insufficiently memorable and intense. I doubt whether the ever-fanciful James Huneker would have conjured up 'a corpse washed ashore from a Venetian lagoon' after hearing Sudbin's cool and temperate way with the Op 27 Nocturne, one of Chopin's most morbid and audacious utterances. His selection of Mazurkas, too, finds him caught between Scylla and Charybdis, though he has a nice sense of the B flat minor Mazurka's fitful attempts to move to a more sunny, less melancholy clime.

In the F minor Fantasie he hardly eclipses memories of Cherkassky's magical idiosyncrasy or Cliburn's soaring eloquence, achieving a higher degree of personal conviction in the Fourth Ballade, clearly a special favourite. For his encore he relaxes and lets his hair down in his own delightfully gaudy paraphrase on the 'Minute' Waltz, complete with a mischievous sidelong glance at Ravel's *La valse*. Elsewhere we are given Chopin with a cooling agent, his fire dimmed in the interests of too general an air of musical propriety. **Bryce Morrison**

## Cowie

**Rutherford's Lights**

**Richard Casey** *pf*

UH Recordings (S) 020011022 (80' • DDD)



### Music from the physics lab via Hertfordshire University

'Richard Casey performs 24 Studies in Light and Colour for solo piano, a dramatic set of

physics-inspired compositions by composer Edward Cowie', the back CD cover hollers, which, when you factor in that the work was commissioned by the Institute of Physics, might reasonably stir up fears that *Rutherford's Lights* is all theory, no soul.

Cowie's composition in fact belongs to the tradition of Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* and Cage's *Atlas eclipicalis*: natural phenomena transmuted into sound manifested as virtuoso piano-writing, and framed as a long-trajectory cycle that evokes a lineage back to Liszt and Alkan. Is Cowie's piece historically transformational like Messiaen and Cage? Clearly it's not, but for honourable reasons. The music is cryptic, expressively allusive; it looks at tradition from the top down, rather than the bottom up.

This cryptic message isn't helped by booklet-notes that strangely omit to explain Cowie's title – Ernest Rutherford was a nuclear physicist who won a Nobel Prize in 1908 – but his creative intentions become clear enough anyway. *Rutherford's Lights* is about how 'effects of light can be observed in some of the most beautiful natural phenomena imaginable', by which he means dispersion of light in mist and water; the distorted geometry of light in mirrors; rainbows et al. Linking the visual to the aural, Cowie has produced a sequence of trippy paintings, duplicated in the booklet, and the music plays hypnagogic sleights-of-hand with flurries of notes and their reflections in emerging resonant spaces.

If you were going to be picky, you might say that over the 80-minute span, *Rutherford's Lights* could do with a more varied palette of gestures. You may well be right. But I find Cowie's obsessive eloquence enlightening.

**Philip Clark**

## E Halffter

Espagnolade. Crepusculos. Marche joyeuse. Piezas infantiles<sup>a</sup>. Sonata. Three Dances from the Ballet 'Sonatina'. Gruss. Llanto por Ricardo Viñes. Serenata a Dulcinea. Pregón Cuba. Habanera. Preludio y Danza. Nocturno otoñal, 'Recordando a Chopin'. Sonata, 'Homenaje a Domenico Scarlatti'. Homenaje a Federico Mompou. Homenaje a Joaquín Turina

**Martin Jones**, <sup>a</sup>**Adrian Farmer** *pf*

Nimbus (P) NI5849 (79' • DDD)



### Our man in Spain with treats by an Iberian gem

With more Spanish discs behind him than any other British pianist, Martin Jones has made a special corner in the Iberian repertoire. After Granados, Albéniz, Falla, Turina and Mompou came Nin, and now Ernesto Halffter (1905–89). And here both mischievous and nostalgic memories of those

## GRAMOPHONE *Archive*

**November 1972:**

### Pollini's next Etudes

We look back to *Gramophone's* take on Pollini's DG recording of Chopin's Etudes, made a decade after those first thoughts newly published this month by Testament (see page 62)

## Chopin

**Etudes – Op 10; Op 25**

**Maurizio Pollini** *pf*

DG (S) 2530 291 (£240)



As Cortot wisely observed, Chopin's Etudes are as inaccessible to the musician without virtuosity as they are to the virtuoso without musicianship.

There is no key to precisely how each study transmutes a technical keyboard problem into pure music; it is in the balance of delight in the keyboard and in the expressive nature of the music which each study embodies that true artistry is found. Pollini is primarily a technician, interested in the virtuosity of the music and the thrill which a brilliant performance of it engenders. At his best, he is very exciting; and he is capable of producing beautiful, warm tone for the reflective E major Study of Op 10. He can also respond to the lightness and delicacy of fingerwork required for the first study of Op 25. But Pollini seems most enthusiastic with the more dramatic, demanding studies. He sets off in Op 10 with a terrific attack, and for all the superb presence of the recording his tone cannot help becoming hard and brittle, with a cannonading bass; Tamás Vásáry (10/67) is steadier, even a little laboured here, while John Browning (7/70) is more vehement but also, with less expense of energy, grander. Again, in the 'Revolutionary' Study, Pollini seems to glory in the violence of the music where Vásáry is more sensitive to its drama and Browning contrives to suggest greater depths of tension.

The recording is technically outstanding; but unless this is the aspect of the Etudes which is counted the most important – and with this music, there is an obvious point in having a recording that really does do full justice to the range and subtlety of piano tone – then I would not commend Pollini above the two earlier issues. Perhaps it is fair to say that for those whose interest in the music leans towards its subtle virtuosity, it is Vásáry who responds more sensitively; those who approach the Etudes more as mood pictures will find their colour and diversity more richly expounded by Browning.

**John Warrack, November 1972**

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composers come dressed in a strikingly novel dress and sophistication. The opening *Espagnolade* remembers Albéniz's 'Seguidillas' (Spanish chopsticks), while the third of the dances from the ballet suite *Sonatina* recalls the wild stamping of Falla's *Fantasia Baetica*. There are shades of Poulenc's *Mouvements perpétuels* in the third of the *Piezas infantiles* (where Jones is joined by Adrian Farmer), while *Homenaje a Federico Mompou* is in beguiling slow waltz-time and *Homenaje a Joaquín Turina* is an all-the-fun-of-the-fair piece. *Pregón Cuba* declares its nationality in every bar, and yet throughout each offering the wonder is that Halffter transforms his sources into a voice that is never less than arresting and original.

Martin Jones's performances are a delectable mix of sensitivity, concentrated wit and energy (try him in *Espagnolade*), making it difficult to imagine such an exotic programme played with greater charm and dexterity. A complete Ravel cycle made in Nimbus's more recent demonstration sound would be more than welcome from this pianist. Calum MacDonald's most informative notes are an added bonus and so is the front cover of 16th-century windmills in Castilla-La Mancha.

**Bryce Morrison**

## Liszt

Grandes études de Paganini, S141. Miserere du Trovatore, S433. Réminiscences de Lucia di Lammermoor, S397. Weihnachtsbaum, S186

**Alfred Brendel** *pf*

Regis © RRC1378 (79' • ADD)

Recorded 1951-60



**Brendel's early 1950s thoughts on Liszt**

This richly comprehensive reissue shows Alfred Brendel in his early years as a towering Lisztian proclaiming Liszt's genius at a time when, notably in London and Vienna, there were still accusations of vulgarity; of music ranging from vainglorious display to senility. For his 1951 recording debut Brendel chose the *Christmas Tree Suite*, profoundly suggestive music from Liszt's final prophetic and dark-hued period. And here in particular, challenged by such unsettling ambiguity, Brendel plays with an imaginative insight and delicacy given to very few pianists. How hauntingly he conveys a work moving from innocence to experience, from simple Christian piety magically evoked in familiar carols, flickering candlelight and a joyous peal of bells, to the pain and desolation of Liszt's final years. What heartfelt anguish in 'Ehemals!' (roughly 'long ago'), what sinister propulsion in 'Ungarisch' or irony in the faux-heroic conclusion to 'Polnisch'. A dark

night of the soul indeed and ill-advised late-night listening to those unwilling to retire haunted by such despair.

A brighter note is sounded in the two operatic paraphrases, thrown off with superb sweep and grandeur, and in the six *Paganini Etudes*, where Brendel combines virtuoso grandeur (that steam-whistle trill at the climax of 'La campanella') with an ever-enlightening wit and perception. The recorded sound may be primitive but nothing can dim such musical quality, as well as one's sense of the absurdity of Earl Wild's recent claim in his nearly 900-page-long memoirs (8/11) that 'Al' was no Lisztian and a musician of severe limitation.

**Bryce Morrison**

## Liszt

Valse-caprice, S427 No 6. Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude, S173 No 3. Six Chants polonais, S480.

Gretchen, S513. Faust (Gounod) - Waltz, S407

**Janina Fialkowska** *pf*

ATMA Classique © ACD2 2641 (71' • DDD)



**Resurgent Canadian moves from Chopin to Liszt**

In the aftermath of so many recordings celebrating the Liszt bicentenary, it is good to be reminded in this recital of a particular aspect of his multifaceted genius. The emphasis here is on variety within variety, on Liszt's generous and extraordinary response to other composers, to Schubert, Chopin, Gounod and to the poet Lamartine – but perhaps, most of all, to himself.

His own arrangement of 'Gretchen' from his *Faust Symphony* is surely the high spot of a recording where you are made aware of Janina Fialkowska's cardinal quality, a moving directness and candour that exclude all archness or affectation. Here is all the bittersweet lyricism of 'Gretchen' offset by a nagging chromaticism, a special tribute to Liszt's later, dark-hued romanticism, with harmony and figuration close to *Les jeux d'eau à la Villa d'Este*, an impressionistic and symbolic masterpiece from Liszt's old age.

Elsewhere, Fialkowska takes the *Faust Waltz* by virtuoso storm and it is only in the 'Bénédiction de Dieu dans la solitude' and in the sixth of the composer's *Soirées de Vienne* that I wished for a more incense-laden way with the Catholic mysticism of the former and a more enticing lilt with the latter. But such considerations aside, all true Lisztians will need to add this disc to their collection. We need many more records from this master-pianist, now thankfully recovered from illness. ATMA Classique's sound is of demonstration quality.

**Bryce Morrison**

## B Marcello

Piano Sonatas, Op 3 - Nos 3, 5, 7, 9 & 10. Minuetto del NH Benedetto Marcello. Minuetto del detto

**Andrea Bacchetti** *pf*

RCA Red Seal © 88697 81466-2 (72' • DDD)



**Marcello revived, edited and played on a Fazioli**

Benedetto Marcello (1686-1739) was a mere eight years younger than his fellow Venetian Antonio Vivaldi and uses a similar musical language, readily heard in the 12 Flute Sonatas, Op 2, of 1712. His keyboard works are virtually unknown. All 12 of his Sonatas for harpsichord, Op 3, which appeared some time between 1712 and the Op 4 Madrigals of 1717, were given their world premiere recordings in 2000 by Italian keyboardist Roberto Loreggian, played on the harpsichord and using an edition prepared by Alessandro Borin. To hear any of the sonatas played on the piano is, in my experience, unique.

For this recording Andrea Bacchetti, in conjunction with Mario Marcarini, has prepared his own new edition from the manuscripts housed in Venice's Marciana Library, and uses a Fazioli grand, taming its lively nature for music of tranquil intimacy. The result is one of almost pure delight. Anyone familiar with Bacchetti's acclaimed recordings of Johann Sebastian Bach and Baldassare Galuppi (and if you haven't heard them, you really should: 4/08, 3/09, 10/09, 9/10) will respond once more to the cool, patrician poise of his playing, quietly voiced, unassuming and, in the slow movements, intensely introspective. Repeats marked in my (no doubt outmoded) edition of a handful of the sonatas are observed only in No 9, with ornaments played discreetly and kept to a minimum. The only movement which does not readily lend itself to the piano is the opening of Sonata No 10 with its alternating passage of thirds and sixths, better suited to the plucking of the harpsichord. The booklet is silent on the music. For information on this you must download a pdf file from the CD.

**Jeremy Nicholas**

## Rachmaninov

Complete Preludes

**Peter Katin** *pf*

Somm Céleste © SOMMCD0110 (79' • ADD)

From Unicorn © UNS230/31 (3/71)

## Rachmaninov

Preludes - Op 3 No 2; Op 23: Nos 2, 4, 5 & 6; Op 32: Nos 2, 3, 4, 5, 10 & 12. Élégie, Op 3 No 1. Variations on a Theme of Corelli, Op 42

**Vassily Primakov** *pf*

Bridge © BRIDGE9348 (79' • DDD)





Tranquil intimacy: Andrea Bacchetti champions Benedetto Marcello



### Different approaches and 40 years separate two accounts of the Preludes

First issued on LP by Unicorn Kanchana and covered by *Gramophone* in the March 1971 issue, Peter Katin's complete traversal of Rachmaninov's piano preludes later appeared on two Olympia CDs (10/87) and a single Pickwick CD, plus several low-price download options. Somm now brings out its own edition in observance of Katin's 80th birthday year.

While the sonics remain colourless, fuzzy and slightly metallic in loud climaxes, this latest remastering adds a modicum of fullness and body masked in previous editions. In general, Katin is technically secure and stylistically idiomatic, although some of the more demanding selections find the pianist erring on the side of caution; note, for example, his solid yet square-toed phrasing throughout Op 32 No 1 in C major, or chord-playing that's ever so slightly frayed around the edges in the thick outer sections of Op 23 Nos 2 and 5. On the other hand, the supple, swirling passagework in Op 23 No 7 in C minor, the intense bravura sweep Katin brings to the A minor Op 32 No 8, plus the flexible lyricism sensitivity revealed in the D major, G major, B minor and G sharp

minor selections, easily hold their own in a catalogue awash with competing versions. In all, the best of Katin's work has much to offer, albeit not quite on the level of other sonically outmoded Rachmaninov Preludes cycles by Fiorentino (APR) and Weissenberg (RCA), let alone Ashkenazy's reference version (Decca). The booklet-notes contain Katin's own 1987 commentaries, plus a recent interview with the pianist by Colin Anderson.

By contrast, Vassily Primakov is a more subjective, rhetorically inclined Rachmaninov interpreter. You hear this right away in the broadly conceived Op 23 No 2, with its overly stretched-out rubatos and artificially highlighted inner voices, or in the fussy tempo adjustments that dissipate the G minor's basic march pulse. However, similar gestures pay more convincing expressive dividends, such as in the gorgeous tonal inflections distinguishing the B minor, G sharp minor and G major Preludes, or within the *Corelli Variations'* dramatic contrasts in dynamics and rhythm. The latter work also showcases Primakov's masterful ability to execute thick chordal passages with maximum *legato* and minimum sustain pedal.

#### Jed Distler

*Preludes – selected comparisons:*

*Weissenberg* (6/72<sup>8</sup>) (RCA) GD60568

*Ashkenazy* (11/85<sup>8</sup>) (DECCA) 475 8238DOR

*Fiorentino* (APR) APR55585

## IN THE STUDIO

An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

### • Lindberg remixed...

Pekka Kuusisto has been immersed in the music of Magnus Lindberg, recording the Finnish composer's Violin Concerto in Helsinki and then creating his own spin-off improvisations entitled *Five Gadgets from the Violin Concerto*. Ondine will release the resulting recordings in May.

### • ...and Ockeghem reborn

Meanwhile, across the Baltic in Copenhagen, Paul Hillier directed vocal group Ars Nova in Ockeghem's *Missa pro defunctis*, interspersed with Bent Sørensen's *Requiem Fragments*, created by the Danish composer using melodic fragments from the Ockeghem. Dacapo's microphones caught it all for a March release.

### • Panufnik senior...

CPO's cycle of major works by Andrzej Panufnik reaches its fifth volume in May with an account of the Pole's landmark Third Symphony. Łukasz Borowicz conducted the orchestra of the Berlin Konzerthaus during the sessions at the ensemble's home in the autumn.

### • ...and Panufnik junior

Bristol-based chamber choir the Exultate Singers have been recording works by Panufnik's daughter Roxanna, including her commemoration of the fall of the Berlin Wall, *All Shall Be Well*. Naxos will have the disc ready for the UK market in May.

### • Antonacci's Wigmore date

As we went to press, the microphones were being adjusted for Anna Caterina Antonacci's mouthwatering lunchtime recital at the Wigmore Hall featuring arias by Marcello, Refice, Cesti, Vivaldi and Donaudy. Wigmore Hall Live plan to press a disc if all goes well.



Sascha Goetzel records again in Istanbul

### • Eastern promise

Following a hair-raising debut on Onyx two years ago, the Borusan Istanbul Philharmonic Orchestra has been recording for the label again – this time taping Ravel, Holst, Prokofiev, Bartók and Schulhoff under Sascha Goetzel above a BMW garage in Istanbul. The disc is out in February.

## Schubert

Piano Sonatas – 'Reliquie', D840; D850. Hungarian Melody, D817. Six German Dances, D820

Shai Vosner pf

Onyx (M) ONYX4073 (76' • DDD)



### Schubert calls for the Israeli-born New Yorker

With this recital Shai Vosner declares himself a Schubertian of unfaltering authority and character. Entirely modern in style (tonally lean and sharply focused, never given to easy or sentimental options), he relishes every twist and turn in the so-called *Reliquie* Sonata, with its quasi-orchestral, defiantly unpianistic first movement and its astonishing second movement modulations (Alkan himself never wrote anything more boldly experimental). Unlike Richter in his monolithic recording, Vosner opts for the two completed movements rather than allowing the music to evaporate into thin air, displaying throughout a finely concentrated sense of music that achieves its vision and depth through extreme austerity.

And again in the towering D major Sonata, even with so many high-flyers in the catalogue (Curzon, Gilels, Brendel, Kempff, etc), Vosner voices his own formidably assured and trenchant voice. Whether fiercely energised in the first movement's propulsion, keeping everything smartly on the move in the second-movement *con moto* (no romantic lingering in the manner of Gilels's magnificent but arguably all-Russian reading) or locating every subtlety beneath the finale's outwardly innocent sing-a-song-of-sixpence surface, Vosner rivets your attention at every point. He also shows a high degree of charm and affection in the *German Dances* and the *Hungarian Melody*, and he is hardly less acute in his accompanying notes, where he writes of the 'almost Brucknerian peaks and valleys' in the C major Sonata. Onyx's sound is exemplary, matching the performances in clarity and warmth. **Bryce Morrison**

## Tellefsen

'The Complete Works for Piano Solo'

Einar Steen-Nøkleberg pf

Simax (P) (4) PSC1239 (4h 43' • DDD)



### Complete piano works of the 'Norwegian Chopin'

The Norwegian pianist-composer Thomas Dyke Akland Tellefsen (1823-74) was a pupil of Chopin in the 1840s – and very much liked to bill himself as such. He writes appealing, well-proportioned short works that one forgets as soon as one has heard them. Simax presents them in strict chronological opus-number order. His

themes (or, more commonly, motifs) are not unattractive but are not the kind that make you sing and can't get out of your head. Many sound like pastiche Chopin, his *Marche funèbre*, Op 16 No 3, laughably so. Struggling to find his own voice, he all too often falls between two stools.

Yet even before the opus numbers climb into double figures, there are glimpses of a composer striking out on his own: *Élégie*, Op 7, written in 1852 in memory of the Swedish Prince Gustav, is a beautiful meditation which includes the chorale 'Wer weiss, wie nahe mir mein Ende', a device Chopin would never have used. Such independence is reflected in his two contemporaneous piano concertos, both worthy of inclusion in Hyperion's Romantic Concerto series had they not already been recorded splendidly by the present pianist. Tellefsen's Sonata (a modest achievement but with an affecting *Adagio* and catchy 6/8 rondo finale), the Six Mazurkas, Op 14, an impressive Grande Polonaise in C sharp minor, Op 18, and other works are well worth hearing – that is until you reach CD 4. This has a handful of student works and another 36 assorted bits and bobs from unpublished manuscripts. They are played on an 1853 Érard and are of interest only to the hardest Tellefsen pianoraks.

Just as Tellefsen's muse is uneven in inspiration, so are Einar Steen-Nøkleberg's playing and Simax's sound which, perhaps because the 52 tracks were recorded at different times in 2009, changes focus, sometimes from item to item. It takes a while for the ear to adjust to the empty ballroom acoustic with close miking, the antithesis of, say, Hyperion's cool clarity. Also, the (unnamed make of) modern concert grand on which discs 1-3 are played has a penetrating, resonant bass register which Einar Steen-Nøkleberg is all too happy to exploit. He can be heavy-handed, over-emphasising the down-beat of a fermata or phrase-ending as though he were announcing the conclusion of the piece; frequently he likes to hover at the climax of a phrase before continuing *a tempo*, an exaggerated rubato that can be highly effective but only if used sparingly.

These distractions are particularly apparent on disc 1 and some items on disc 3; on disc 2 the recorded sound is generally – but not exclusively – less in-your-face, Steen-Nøkleberg's phrasing and dynamics more subtly graded, the pedal action less noticeable. At his best, he turns in some remarkably fine performances, his tonal colouring, flashes of bravura and imagination more pronounced than Hubert Rutkowski on his selection of four titles on Naxos (though I prefer the latter's recorded sound), the kind of musical engagement that comes with a 50-year relationship with the music. The whole



Thomas Tellefsen: unevenly inspired

project is handsomely presented with an excellent 47-page booklet in Norwegian, English and French. 'I have given my very soul to bring [Tellefsen] into the light in the year 2011', writes the pianist, with the hope that 'these pieces will be played by many a young musician'.

Jeremy Nicholas

## Aisha Orazbayeva

'Outside'

Sciarrino Six Caprices Ravel Violin Sonata – Allegretto Zinovieff/Orazbayeva Five Bagatelles from OUR Salvador/Tsepín Pchela i Babachka Lachenmann Toccata (arr Orazbayeva)

Aisha Orazbayeva vn

Nonclassical (M) NONCLSS013 (53' • DDD)



### Nonclassical puts its faith in star violinist Orazbayeva

Look, I don't want to appear chippy – that's Nonclassical's job – but a label that chooses to define itself by what it's not and then, guess what, releases music that reveals, actually, what it thinks it isn't it most certainly is, can't fool all of the people all of the time. Whenever I hear Sciarrino and Lachenmann, my hunch that the cartel surrounding modern composition is finished, parked up in a middle-of-the-road central reservation waiting for the tow van, is momentarily overcome. Yes, there is hope. Peter Zinovieff, the electronic music sage and one-time close confidant of Birtwistle, is represented, Ravel's Violin Sonata too. How could this record miss?

It's non-classical, pro-fad marketing, that's how. Protecting music from the more regressive, supercilious tendencies of 'classical music culture' is a worthwhile thing but sticking the prefix 'non' in front of anything you don't like, hoping that might bring about change, is doomed, especially when you have nothing meaningful to proffer as an alternative. Sciarrino's Six Caprices are scurrying, trembling, fragile portals into the



outer limits of violin timbre that really can't be recorded too clearly. So what does Orazbayeva do? She puts the piece into 'real-life acoustic environments' – car parks, warehouses, bus stops et al – thereby killing Sciarrino's nuances of micro-sound stone dead. Segueing Lachenmann's Toccata into a maudlin Russian folksong is just non-sense.

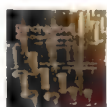
The press release claims Zinoviev's *OUR* is 'extraordinary' and the interlacing of string and electronic textures is indeed stylish; but I don't hear the Ravel 'as raw and heartfelt'. This is a remarkably unremarkable performance – and why one movement only? Looking at the press release closer, I notice Nonclassical is happy to trade off Orazbayeva's utterly classical associations: Boulez, Birtwistle, Ensemble Modern, the London Sinfonietta, which about says it all – its posturing against a club it desperately wants to be, and is, part of.

Philip Clark

## 'Dancing Pipes'

**Bach** Concerto No 1, BWV592 (after Concerto by Johann Ernst) **Brahms** 11 Chorale Preludes, Op 122 – Herzlich tut mich verlangen **Heiller** Tanz-Toccata **N Lindberg** Visa från Älvdalen **N Rawsthorne** Dance Suite **Yon** Humoresque, 'L'organo primitivo' **P Petersson** Dancing Pipes. Organ Mass – Agnus Dei. Tre canti sacri<sup>®</sup>

**Mary Chard Petersson** *org* <sup>®</sup>**Choir of Älmhult Church** Nosag <sup>®</sup> CD199 (61' • DDD)



### Canadian draws sweet sounds from Swedish organ

What a delightful recital this is. Charming music played with precision, sensitivity and a touch of aplomb, showing off a delightful organ and with a pleasant surprise at the end. My only slight disappointment is a rather stopping-and-starting 'Line Dance' wrapping up Noel Rawsthorne's jovial *Dance Suite* which ensures textural security at the expense of humour. Christopher Herrick brings this off with real panache (Hyperion, 10/01) but he only offers up the 'Line Dance'; here we have the complete Suite.

The 2009 Ruffatti organ in Sweden's Älmhult Church is visually and aurally a fine instrument which speaks with great clarity and brightness, although never that piercing brightness which distinguishes so many new organs, and has plenty of warmth, especially in the pedals, which can sound a little woody but never muddy. In short, it seems just about the ideal church organ.

And, if this playing is anything to go by, Mary Chard Petersson – Canadian born and Viennese trained – is the ideal church organist. She's not the organist at Älmhult – that position is held by her Swedish husband, Per Gunnar – but she clearly knows her way around

this instrument and displays it to its very best advantage in a programme which captivatingly spans the gamut from Bach's bubbly Concerto transcription to Lindberg's endearing folk melody, and from Brahms at his most intimate to Heiller at his most extrovert.

The surprise? Mr Petersson's work involves the church choir, who add a nice touch of sanctity to the whole disc. Highly enjoyable.

Marc Rochester

## 'Homage to Paderewski'

**Bartók** Three Hungarian Folk-Tunes, Sz66

**A Benjamin** Elegiac Mazurka **Blumenfeld** Suite

polonaise No 2, Op 31 – Kujawiak; Obertas

**Britten** Mazurka elegiaca, Op 23 No 2<sup>®</sup>

**Castelnuovo-Tedesco** Hommage à Paderewski

**Chaminade** Etude symphonique, Op 28 **Chanler**

Aftermath **Goossens** Homage **R Hammond** Dance

**Labunski** Threnody **Martinů** Mazurka, H284

**Milhaud** Choral **Nin-Culmell** In memoriam

Paderewski **Rathaus** Kujawiak **Rieti** Allegro

danzante **Schelling** Nocturne (Ragusa). Con

tenerezza **Stojowski** Cradle Song **Weinberger**

Etude **Whithorne** Hommage, Op 58 No 2

**Wieniawski** Etude, Op 44 No 22 **Zarzycki** Chant du printemps, Op 34 No 1

**Jonathan Plowright**, <sup>®</sup>**Aaron Shorr** *pf*

Hyperion <sup>®</sup> CDA67903 (76' • DDD)

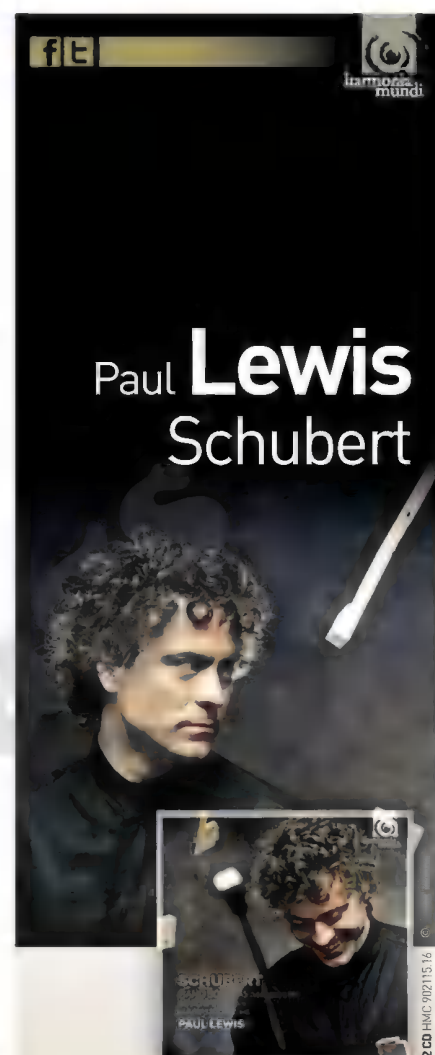


### Plowright salutes the phenomenon Paderewski

'A star who fell from heaven' (the *Detroit News*), Paderewski as statesman, fierce nationalist and above all pianist swept all before him. No pianist excepting Liszt and, in our own time, Van Cliburn has ever been accorded such extravagant celebrity. And here, in this intriguing programme, he is seen through the eyes of many composers (some familiar, many obscure), anxious to pay tribute to a legend. To be candid, not all the 24 items on offer on this disc are diamonds rather than paste. The ghost of Chopin hangs heavily over several contributions, with the Mazurka, most ethnic of Polish dances, seen through modernist, distorting-mirror eyes.

The genuine jewels include Ernest Schelling's sultry and ambitious Nocturne, a real find, and, better known, Britten's poignant *Mazurka elegiaca* (where Plowright is joined by Aaron Shorr). But Richard Hammond's *Dance*, a percussive relative of Ginastera's, is forgettable and there is little beyond a faded picture-postcard charm to Zarzycki's *Chant du printemps*. What is not forgettable are performances of a superlative technique and musicianship. Pianism and sheer musical quality of this order are rare at any time, and Hyperion's recordings from Potton Hall and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama are exemplary.

Bryce Morrison



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# Vocal



Geoffrey Norris reviews André Previn's Rachmaninov on DVD

*'It has that unpalpable tingle of unfamiliar music being unveiled and given new, vibrant life'* ► REVIEW ON PAGE 72



Mike Ashman reviews Patricia Petibon's 'Melancolia' album

*'Throughout, Petibon's acting and character skills evidently lift each interpretation'* ► REVIEW ON PAGE 74

## Aperghis

'A portée de voix'

Calme plat – I-V. Dialogue amoureux. Simulacre II. Rire physiologique. Monomanies. Fidélité. Pub I-II

Valérie Philippin voc

Ensemble Kiosk / Jean-Philippe Causse voc/pf

Ameson (M) 2 (CD + DVD) ASCP1019 (61' + 50' • DDD)

DVD features performance footage and interviews



The seriously whimsical music of Georges Aperghis

Whenever a new disc by Georges Aperghis arrives, I get a tingle where it counts most – no other living composer writes music that is so seriously entertaining.

'Entertainment' is, of course, a problematic word in the context of 'serious' modern composition, so let me explain what I mean. Aperghis was born in Athens but has spent most of his adult life in France. His wife is Édith Scob, the actress famous for her role in 1950s schlock horror art flick *Eyes Without a Face*, and Aperghis's music thrives in that same fantasy world of magic realism: the world of Jacques Tati and Marcel Marceau; serious whimsy, very serious questions asked about the nature of musical language.

*Simulacre II* (1994) for voice, marimba, percussion and bass clarinet illuminates the Aperghis code most clearly, as he unpacks ideas about the most fundamental concept of chamber-playing – how musicians listen. Players introduce themselves with an unaccompanied solo. 'Simulacre' because these solos are then combined in all possible instrumental permutations, and having learnt the material one way, the musicians need to bend towards each new passing context; the nitty-gritty necessities of how the vocal line moves from bass clarinet to marimba are balanced and coloured. Heightened listening; remembering what went before as you play in the now.

As deadpan as stone as they redistribute the constituent parts, Valérie Philippin, Ludovic Montet and Aurélie Pichon reveal how cunningly fit for purpose Aperghis's material is. Diced up syllables, open vowel sounds and phonemes are mulched together, creating a fantasy language rich in inference and

suggestion, utterance remodelled from first principles like a Marcel Marceau mime. With Aperghis's gestures defining their own narrative, he has licence to reorder and filter them as he pleases.

The disc begins with Philippin's recitation of *Calme* – giggly, breathless, cartoon vocal soliloquies – and climaxes with the hallucinogenic microtonal patois of *Fidélité* for voice and harp. **Philip Clark**

## Britten

The Birds<sup>a</sup>. Chamber Music V<sup>c</sup>. A Charm of Lullabies, Op 41<sup>b</sup>. Dans les bois<sup>a</sup>. Fish in the unruffled lakes – The sun shines down<sup>c</sup>; What's in your mind?<sup>e</sup>; Fish in the unruffled lakes<sup>f</sup>; Underneath the abject willow<sup>f</sup>. Gloriana, Op 53 – Second Lute Song of the Earl of Essex<sup>f</sup>. Two Hardy Songs<sup>f</sup>. O why did e'er my thoughts aspire<sup>g</sup>. Of a' the airts the wind can blow<sup>d</sup>. On This Island, Op 11<sup>a</sup>. The Red Cockatoo<sup>a</sup>. Songs and Proverbs of William Blake, Op 74<sup>g</sup>. Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo, Op 22<sup>c</sup>. Three Soutar Rhymes<sup>d</sup>. Who are these children?, Op 84<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Elizabeth Atherton sop<sup>b</sup>Jennifer Johnston mez

<sup>c</sup>Allan Clayton, <sup>d</sup>Nicky Spence, <sup>e</sup>Benjamin Hulett,

<sup>f</sup>Robin Tritschler tens<sup>g</sup>Benedict Nelson bar

Malcolm Martineau pf

Onyx (M) 2 ONYX4079 (135' • DDD)



Malcolm Martineau curates Vol 2 of Britten's songs

The second volume of Aldeburgh Music's survey of Britten's songs sweeps up the remaining major cycles. A fine line has been drawn between what is in and what is out – no songs with guitar or harp accompaniment, none of the folksongs or realisations of Purcell and others – but perhaps there are further volumes to come. They would certainly be welcome, as the plan of entrusting the project to the younger generation of British and Irish singers has turned out to be an additional attraction.

In particular, it is fortuitous that such a range of talented young tenors is on hand. Allan Clayton kicks off this second volume with a lyrical rendering of the *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo*, touching extremes of sensitivity in his (rather slow) third and last sonnets. In a different vein Nicky Spence stays just the right

side of Scots caricature in *Who are these children?*, Britten's late cycle to poems by the Scottish William Soutar, and tacks on the three additional Soutar settings also included on Mark Wilde's recent Naxos disc (A/11). Benjamin Hulett makes a versatile interpreter of 'The Red Cockatoo' and other songs (except 'Um Mitternacht' in Vol 1), a welcome alternative to Ian Bostridge's Hyperion disc (1/96); and Robin Tritschler is back with a few odd settings of Hardy and Auden, including the iridescent 'Fish in the Unruffled Lakes'.

That leaves three cycles for other voices. Elizabeth Atherton occasionally sounds hard pressed by *On This Island* but her slim, elegant soprano has a crystalline beauty elsewhere. The mezzo Jennifer Johnston provides much warm and subtle singing in a highly attractive performance of *A Charm of Lullabies*. As at the live Aldeburgh Music evening at Kings Place in London, baritone Benedict Nelson is superbly measured and thoughtful in the *Songs and Proverbs of William Blake* (though it is too soon to set aside the ravishing lure of Gerald Finley on this year's Solo Vocal *Gramophone* Award-winning disc – 7/10). Whoever he is accompanying, pianist Malcolm Martineau is an expert guide. Though other individual recordings may be preferable, this second volume of Britten songs is again greater than the sum of its parts. **Richard Fairman**

## Handel

'Il caro Sassone'

Armida abbandonata, HWV105. Delirio amoroso, HWV99 – Sonata. Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno, HWV46a – Lascia la spina. Salve regina, HWV241. La Resurrezione, HWV47 – Disserratevi, o porte d'Averno. Tu fedel? tu costante?, HWV171 – Sonata. Alpreste monte, HWV81. Sonata a 5, HWV288 – Andante. Clori, Tirsi e Fileno, HWV96 – Tirsi, mio caro...Barbaro, tu non credi. Aminta e Fillide, HWV83 – Se vaga rio

Lucy Crowe sop English Concert / Harry Bicket

Harmonia Mundi (E) HMU90 7559 (75' • DDD • T/T)



Handel in Italy, flattering his patrons with beguiling cantatas

When opera was proscribed by the Papal decree as frivolous and depraved (not that the



Vatican objected to castratos!), the Roman aristocracy consoled itself with dramatic cantatas, in effect miniature unstaged operas. 'Il caro Sassone', as the young Handel was affectionately dubbed, enchanted his Roman patrons with dozens of such cantatas. As an inveterate musical recycler, he then quarried the cantatas and oratorios he composed in Italy for his London works. The exquisite (and exquisitely sung) sarabande 'Lascia la spina' from *Il trionfo del Tempo e del Disinganno*, for instance, was plundered for *Rinaldo*, while a lilting aria from the cantata *Aminta e Fillide* that hovers hauntingly between minor and major became the Sirens' Song in the same opera.

With her vernal light lyric soprano, grace of line and vivid response to mood, Lucy Crowe proves well-nigh ideal in this conspectus of music from Handel's Italian years. Other singers, including Emanuela Galli (Glossa, 10/07), have brought more passion, and more verbal savour (Crowe's Italian consonants sometimes lack 'bite'), to the tragic cantata *Armida abbandonata*. But she is intensely moving in Armida's final aria, singing with a haunted, bleached tone before a sudden infusion of bitterness at the accusatory 'quel traditor'. Here and elsewhere she subtly varies her vibrato for expressive effect.

In the poignant 'Ad te clamamus' from the *Salve regina*, Crowe negotiates the vertiginous leaps with effortless poise, while in an aria from *La Resurrezione* she puts the powers of darkness to flight in volleys of gleeful, glittering coloratura. Here and in Clori's indignant protestation of her innocence from *Clori, Tirsi e Fileno*, her *da capo* ornamentation soars extravagantly into the stratosphere, far above the range of Handel's singers. Yet she brings it off with such panache that only a hair-shirt purist could complain. Crowe's delectable singing is complemented by fresh, rhythmically buoyant and, where needed, virtuoso playing from the English Concert, who on their own give sparkling performances of three instrumental numbers from that astonishingly fertile Italian sojourn.

Richard Wigmore

## Janáček

Glagolitic Mass<sup>3</sup>. Sinfonietta

<sup>3</sup>Christiane Libor sop <sup>3</sup>Ewa Marciniak contr

<sup>3</sup>Timothy Bentch ten <sup>3</sup>Wojciech Gierlach bass

<sup>3</sup>Jaroslav Malanowicz org Warsaw Philharmonic

<sup>3</sup>Choir and Orchestra / Antoni Wit

Naxos © 8 572639; ©  NBD0026 (63' • DDD • T/t)



Wit and his Polish forces in staple Janáček scores

This new coupling of the best-known masterpieces of Janáček's last and most

productive decade enters a highly competitive market, with Ančerl and Rattle setting the bar at a formidable height for the Mass, and Kubelík and Mackerras likewise for the Sinfonietta.

It is pleasing to report, therefore, that the new contender is seriously competitive, both in terms of the quality of the musicianship and interpretation on display, as well as the recorded sound. It obviously helped that the recording sessions for the Mass came hot on the heels of two performances given by Wit's Warsaw Philharmonic forces in April 2010. Following the familiar 'revised', final version of the score, as first performed in December 1927, this is a performance which is gripping from start to finish. The polished choral singing is a joy, with excellent pitching throughout, especially in the cruelly exposed unaccompanied entries. The orchestra's contribution is equally distinguished. How refreshing it is to hear such 'unhomogenised' clarinet- and trumpet-playing.

The solo quartet also acquits itself favourably, in particular Christiane Libor, who is on spectacular form. Timothy Bentch is almost over-fervent, occasionally yelping in his urgent imploring, though he reins things in well for the moments when he is joined by the alto and bass. Further plaudits for Jarosław Malanowicz's (seemingly) effortless organ solo.

As a bonus, the new Sinfonietta recording easily supplants Ondrej Lenárd's 20-year old recording for Naxos with the Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra. The balance is first-rate and no tiny detail is overlooked.

Malcolm Riley

Mass – selected comparisons:

Czech PO, Ančerl (11/64<sup>3</sup>) (SUPR) SU3667-2

CBSO, Rattle (5/82<sup>3</sup>) (EMI) 566980-2

Sinfonietta – selected comparisons:

Bavarian Rad SO, Kubelík (9/71<sup>3</sup>) (ELOQ) 480 0643

VPO, Mackerras (7/81<sup>3</sup>) (DECC) 448 255-2

Slovak Rad SO, Lenárd (3/92) (NAXO) 8 550411

## Mahler • Schumann

Mahler Das Lied von der Erde<sup>3</sup>

Schumann Symphony No 4, Op 120

<sup>3</sup>Carolyn Watkinson mez <sup>3</sup>John Mitchinson ten

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Kurt Sanderling

Video director Roy Tipping

ICA Classics ©  ICAD5042

(95' • NTSC • 4:3 • PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Royal Albert Hall, London,

July 29, 1988

## Mahler

Das Lied von der Erde

Jane Henschel mez Gregory Kunde ten

Houston Symphony Orchestra / Hans Graf

Naxos © 8 572498 (63' • DDD)

Recorded live at Jesse H Jones Hall for the Performing Arts, Houston, November 2009



Das Lied live from eighties

London and noughties Houston

Silly me. Last year around this time I thought I had all the recordings of *Das Lied von der Erde* I'd ever need. Little did I count on the flurry of issues (and reissues) surrounding this year's Mahler centenary, including at least two competing *Das Lieds* in Schoenberg's chamber orchestration. One would have to search carefully, though, to find more dissimilar versions than these two releases.

Kurt Sanderling's 1988 performance with the BBC Philharmonic at the Royal Albert Hall (available on DVD for the first time) is a bit of a throwback. Not only does it recall a time when a Mahler performance was an event, it downplays the episodic emotional extremes that have now become de rigueur. Sanderling's Mahler unfolds as if Bernstein never existed.

Rather than channelling the physical labours required by the piece's musical demands – particularly for the vocalists – into a particular form of emotional drama, Sanderling makes it all seem relatively effortless, elevating Mahler to the proverbial Olympian heights with no visible means of support. He uses much the same approach here with Schumann's Fourth Symphony – rarely, in fact, have I heard the piece waft so relatively breezily – and if anything links the composers together in a through line of German Romanticism.

Mahler's song-symphony demands equal time of the vocalists, and here Sanderling is blessed with singers highly compatible with his interpretation. The versatile tenor John Mitchinson soars comfortably even in the piece's highest registers, and mezzo-soprano Carolyn Watkinson – best known for singing Baroque repertory – brings to Mahler a comparable sense of musical and emotional transparency, particularly in the concluding 'Abschied'.

Even though the almost embarrassing overproduction of Mahler in the past decades has raised the bar ridiculously high, worthwhile recordings do occasionally seep through and, in the case of the Houston Symphony under Hans Graf, demand to be taken seriously. Graf's musical values are entirely different from Sanderling's; clarity is prized above all, not merely in the musical line but in each little diversion along the way. But individual threads never dangle far from the musical fabric.



Perhaps the only similarity between these recordings is their use of non-traditional Mahler singers. Although mezzo-soprano Jane Henschel, a frequent performer of

Wagner and Strauss, finds herself on familiar ground, it's Gregory Kunde – generally a *bel canto* tenor – who remains the standout. I'm not sure how much of Kunde's refined elegance would soar above the orchestra in a live performance but this is the first *Das Lied* recording in a long time that made me wish Mahler wrote more for the tenor. **Ken Smith**

## Mahler

Symphony No 2, 'Resurrection'

**Christiane Oelze** *sop* **Sarah Connolly** *mez* **MDR Radio Choir; Berlin Radio Choir; Leipzig Gewandhaus Choir and Orchestra / Riccardo Chailly**

Accentus ⑤  ACC20238; ⑥  ACC10238 (96' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo, DTS 5.1 & DTS-HD MA • O • S)



Recorded live, May 2011

Video director **Henning Kasten**

## Mahler

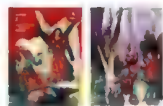
Symphony No 8

**Erika Sunnegårdh, Ricarda Merbeth, Christiane Oelze** *sops* **Lioba Braun, Gerhild Romberger** *contrs* **Stephen Gould** *ten* **Dietrich Henschel** *bar* **Georg Zeppenfeld** *bass* **MDR Radio Choir; Leipzig Opera Chorus; Leipzig Thomanerchor; Gewandhaus Children's Choir; Leipzig Gewandhaus Choir and Orchestra / Riccardo Chailly**

Accentus ⑤  ACC20222; ⑥  ACC10222 (92' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo, DTS 5.1 & DTS-HD MA • O • S)

Recorded live, May 2011

Video director **Michael Beyer**



Chailly returns to two of Mahler's massive choral symphonies for DVD. In recording his Mahler cycle in Amsterdam there was a sense in which Riccardo Chailly was bringing coals to Newcastle. That orchestra's active Mahler tradition pretty much guaranteed the success of the project and with top-notch Decca sound too. In Leipzig, where Chailly assumed the position of Gewandhauskapellmeister at the start of the 2005/06 season, things were rather different. Mahler himself served a two-year stint from 1886 as second-in-charge at the city opera house but Chailly needed all his crusading zeal to bring the composer to the heart of modern concert life. The present DVDs preserve the opening and closing nights of the Leipzig's high-powered, multi-orchestra International Mahler Festival held last May. While coasting through the music would never be an option for these mainly local performers (the Gewandhaus had only twice previously given the Eighth, in 1950 and 1985), their thorough preparation bears fruit in what must be some of the 'cleanest' Mahler ever delivered to a paying audience. In both symphonies the 1980s venue and functional camerawork make for a rather

antiseptic visual effect when the focus moves away from the maestro himself. However, the clarity, range and depth of sound, allied to the exceptional quality of the singing and playing, are certain to impress.

Interpretatively speaking, Chailly's *Resurrection* is unashamedly mainstream, more straightforward than Bernstein's, sunnier and more muscular than Abbado's, with forthright contributions from harp and percussion. Typically, the first movement ends with a downward plunge neither precipitate nor interminably drawn out. During the general pause that follows, the vocal soloists join those already onstage. The inner movements are articulated with remarkable precision even if some will consider their shadowy corners overlit. A sign of emotional detachment? Perhaps so; still, the excellent Sarah Connolly provides a lovely, intimate reading of the 'Urlicht' and there is no lack of tension as the epic finale crashes in. A momentary lack of unanimity with the offstage brass hints at human frailty in an otherwise startling, almost forensic display. The first choral entry is daringly slow and beautifully modulated. No stranger to the soprano part even if, like Connolly, apparently a late substitute, Christiane Oelze is outstanding too, at once bright and warm. Chailly obtains a moment of silence before thunderous applause.

The performance of the Eighth, at least as fine, is not quite what I was expecting. On rival DVDs in altogether lower-fi, Bernstein and Tennstedt offer more subjective visions. For example, both make a huge unmarked *rallentando* into the climax of the 'Veni, Creator Spiritus', a tactic Chailly eschews until the last moment. In exchanging ceremonial pomp and adrenalin-rush for an unforced, unmannered, surprisingly lyrical approach, Chailly unearths a wealth of rarely heard contrapuntal detail and secures a rare unanimity of response. The solo singers and here purely local choral forces are on the same exalted level as his venerable band, whose dark transparency and unique, late-Romantic sound are, he believes, perfect for these scores. Oelze reappears as a radiant Mater Gloriosa but there are no significant weaknesses in the line-up. That the tenor sounds strained at times is surely the fault of the composer. The symphony's very opening may strike you as a little cautious, the organ relatively puny, but the choral sonority has real weight and it is fair to say that the sonic impact of the work's stupefying final pages has never been more faithfully conveyed on disc. The hushed choral singing, with crucial entries always perfectly calibrated, is a marvel in itself, and Chailly permits some unexpectedly regional-sounding woodwind to pep up certain passages in the immense second movement. In short – even if you feel

that Chailly's Mahler lacks a certain emotional *chiaroscuro* – these renditions must go right to the top of the list on technical grounds, irrespective of sound carrier. You can always switch off the images of the dishevelled maestro and his variously rumpled forces if you prefer to just listen.

For good or ill, Accentus's artwork showcases the peculiar creations of Leipzig artist Neo Rauch and the annotations play up Mahler's own Leipzig connections. The issuing company, it seems, is also local, and has gone to town on the presentational aspect, although French readers will note some confusion over subtitles in the booklet for the Eighth. No matter. Both discs are also available in Blu-ray. Strongly recommended.

**David Gutman**

*Selected comparison:*

*Syms Nos 2 & 8 – selected comparison:*

*Bernstein (2/06) (DG) 073 4088GH9*

*Sym No 2 – selected comparison:*

*Abbado (12/04<sup>th</sup>) (EURO) 205 3269*

*Sym No 8 – selected comparison:*

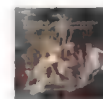
*Tennstedt (11/92<sup>nd</sup>) (EMI) 367743-9*

## Montéclair

*Le retour de la paix. Pan et Syrinx. Le triomfe de la constance. La mort de Didon. La morte di Lucretia*

**Emma Kirkby** *sop* **London Baroque**

BIS ⑤ BIS-CD1865 (70' • DDD • T/t)



Chamber cantatas by a bass-playing Frenchman with verve

Michel Pignolet de Montéclair has often been categorised merely in terms of having come in between Lully and Rameau, but actually he was a composer with considerable character of his own, a natural dramatist whose opera *Jephté* was acknowledged by Rameau as inspiration for his own first stage work, *Hippolyte et Aricie*.

The five chamber cantatas presented here (Montéclair wrote 24) are full of interest and imagination, revealing their composer's ability to mould the music to genuinely sympathetic ends while retaining his French classical poise. As a bass player at the Opéra, he was aware of the role instruments could play, and some of the most effective touches here are when, for instance, the bass viol weeps with the lover in *Le triomfe de la constance*, or a muted violin squeaks out pained pipe music in *Pan et Syrinx*. The intimacy of these cantatas is affecting but Montéclair's touch is no less assured in the more momentous operatic emotions of *Le retour de la paix*, *La mort de Didon* and the Italianate *La morte di Lucretia*.

Emma Kirkby singing French repertoire is a rare thing but her old friends London Baroque are steeped in it, and these performances are as stylish as one could wish.





Mahler's multitudes: the Eighth Symphony in performance at the Leipzig Gewandhaus

The sound, as often with BIS, is a touch swimmy but its fullness certainly lends weight to the music. Kirkby's voice could have been brought further forward but her ever-present virtues of clarity, secure passagework and interpretative intelligence still emerge, if without the particular colouring and line a French singer might have brought to it. You can get that, if you want it, from an old disc featuring some of these cantatas from Les Arts Florissants (Harmonia Mundi, 6/89 – nla), though it comes with a few rough edges. But whether with that disc, this one or both, Montéclair is certainly worth getting to know.

Lindsay Kemp

## Mozart

Mass No 16, 'Coronation', K317<sup>a</sup>. Ave verum corpus, K618. Vesperae solennes de Confessore, K339<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Laurence Kilsby *treb* <sup>a</sup>Jeremy Kenyon *alto*

<sup>a</sup>Christopher Watson *ten* <sup>a</sup>Christopher Borrett *bass*

Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum of Dean Close Preparatory School; Charivari Agréable / Benjamin Nicholas

Delphian © DCD34102 (55' • DDD • T/t)



Mozart's church music places the boys at centre stage

Of all his Salzburg Masses, it's no surprise that the so-called *Coronation* remains the most popular. Not only among the most colourful (alongside a full complement of four soloists

and choir, the orchestra includes a pair of horns as well as trumpets and drums), it's a fine example of Mozart's gift for melody. Indeed, the similarities of the *Kyrie*'s melody to Fiordiligi's 'Come scoglio' (*Così fan tutte*) and of the *Agnus Dei* to the Countess's 'Dove sono' (*The Marriage of Figaro*) have been noted. It's apt, then, that the Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum's solo treble, Laurence Kilsby, has a mature voice with a hint of quasi-operatic 'wobble'; he combines well with the adult soloists. The choir are full of the abandon of this delicious music and the small-scale period-instrument band Charivari Agréable accompany most agreeably (fantastic gunshot timps!).

The *Ave verum corpus* is taken too slow for my liking: *Adagio* it may be but it's marked to be beaten with two, not four, beats to the bar. The choir seem less sure of themselves in the *Solemn Vespers* – there are some noticeably sour entries – although they clearly have a lot of fun in the contrapuntal *tour de force* of the 'Laudate pueri' and Kilsby again provides a touching 'Laudate Dominum'. Still, this disc is worthwhile as notice of the sterling work Benjamin Nicholas has been doing with his young charges; it's worth it also for the Mass in a vibrant boys-and-men version. The comprehensive and charming packaging puts the Tewkesbury lads centre stage, which is precisely where they should be.

David Thresher

## Mozart

Ave verum corpus, K618. Requiem, K626<sup>a</sup>.

Per questa bella mano, K612<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Elizabeth Watts *sop* <sup>a</sup>Phyllis Pancellor *mez* <sup>a</sup>Andrew Kennedy *ten* <sup>ab</sup>Eric Owens *bass-bar* <sup>b</sup>Robert Nairn *db*

Handel and Haydn Society / Harry Christophers

Coro © COR16093 (54' • DDD • T/t)

Recorded live at Symphony Hall, Boston, April & May 2011



Christophers wears his other hat for a live Boston Requiem

Harry Christophers follows up his Boston recording of the C minor Mass (A/10) with Mozart's other great unfinished sacred work, the Requiem. Once again the edition used is the 'traditional' Süssmayr; the performance is solid, the Handel and Haydn Society's choral singers undaunted by the treacherous semiquavers of the Handelian 'Kyrie' fugue. Elizabeth Watts leads a reasonable team of soloists, who blend well in the quartet movements. The recording grants welcome clarity to the orchestration, with *colle parti* trombones particularly audible. Tempi are generally brisk: some listeners may wish for a more meditative approach to the 'Recordare' or a touch more flexibility in the changing moods of the 'Confutatis'.

Why, though, does the return to the opening music at 'Lux aeterna' fail to bring that all-important sense of homecoming?

One reason, perhaps, is that the disc opens not with the funereal tread of the *Introitus* but with the *Ave verum corpus*, the Corpus Christi motet Mozart wrote earlier in 1791. No complaints about the performance of this 46-bar work of divine inspiration; but the sense is already of closure and resignation, of a D major string halo salving the departed soul even before the cries for mercy have been raised.

Another oddity is the disc's closing item, the aria 'Per questa bella mano' composed still earlier in 1791 for the bass FX Gerl, who was to become the first Sarastro. Once again, the performance of this delightful piece is all one could wish for. Yet it seems – rather like the obbligato double bass that might take the unwary listener by surprise (and with its somewhat self-serving introductory commentary) – as if someone else's project has wandered in by mistake. **David Threasher**

## Palestrina · Pärt

**Palestrina** Missa Papae Marcelli (two recordings)

**Pärt** I Am the True Vine. The Woman with the Alabaster Box. Tribute to Caesar. Most Holy Mother of God

**Netherlands Chamber Choir / Risto Joost**  
Globe ⑤ GLO5240 (79' • DDD)



Pärt adds dimensions to Palestrina's Papal Mass

Apart from the fact that this is simply heavenly singing and the music absolutely divine, there seems no earthly reason why the Netherlands Chamber Choir have given us Palestrina's *Missa Papae Marcelli* twice on this disc; both versions recorded at the same session. First they juxtapose it with four sacred *a cappella* pieces by Pärt and, assuming we are incapable of reprogramming our players, do the whole thing again without the intervening tracks.

On the grounds that you can't have too much of a good thing, I find no cause for complaint at this opportunity to hear the Palestrina twice in one sitting. Certainly Risto Joost lets the music unfold with sumptuous expansiveness, the polyphonic lines gracefully revealing themselves in Globe's opulent recording made in Amsterdam's Waalse Kerk. The singers, all 20 of them, produce a rich and wonderfully balanced sound, marvellous depth in the basses and a delectable fluidity in the sopranos. Truly this is a choir of great distinction.

The logic of interpolating the Pärt pieces is fully explained in a nicely designed booklet but I have to confess that when we first move from the Palestrina *Kyrie* to *The Woman with the Alabaster Box*, settings of words from Matthew's Gospel concerning the disciples' anger at the apparent profligacy of a woman who poured expensive ointment over Christ's feet only to

experience themselves the gentle rebuke of Christ, one wonders whether it was such a good idea; it seems almost as if Pärt is offering up a very pale imitation of Palestrina. But as the piece expands and those magical Pärtisms emerge, it all begins to make sense and, while it neither adds to nor subtracts from the inherent beauty of the Palestrina, given these exceptional performances, the disc certainly adds a new dimension to this oft-recorded staple of the repertoire.

**Marc Rochester**

## Rachmaninov

**The Bells**, Op 35<sup>a</sup>. **Three Russian Songs**, Op 41. **Spring**, Op 20<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>**Svetla Vassileva** *sop* <sup>a</sup>**Misha Didyk** *ten* <sup>ab</sup>**Alexei Tanovitski** *bass* **Chorus of the Mariinsky Theatre; BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / Gianandrea Noseda**  
Chandos ⑤ CHAN10706 (63' • DDD • T/t)  
Recorded live at the Royal Albert Hall, July 2011

## Rachmaninov · Prokofiev

**Bernstein** *Candide* – Overture<sup>a</sup> **Prokofiev**

*Lieutenant Kijé* – Symphonic Suite, Op 60<sup>b</sup>

**Rachmaninov** *The Bells*, Op 35<sup>c</sup>

<sup>c</sup>**Sheila Armstrong** *sop* <sup>c</sup>**Robert Tear** *ten*

<sup>c</sup>**John Shirley-Quirk** *bass-bar* **London Symphony**

<sup>c</sup>**Chorus and Orchestra / André Previn**

*Video director* **Brian Large**

ICA Classics ⑤ DVD ICAD5038

(62' • NTSC • 4:3 • PCM stereo • 0)

Recorded live at the <sup>a</sup>Royal Festival Hall, London, November 25, 1971; <sup>b</sup>Royal Albert Hall, London, July 26, 1973; <sup>b</sup>Fairfield Hall, Croydon, April 24, 1977



Live Bells from the '70s and last year's Proms provide a lesson in contrasts. These performances of *The Bells* are linked by venue. When a Beatle-haired André Previn brought the LSO and Chorus to the Royal Albert Hall in July 1973, *The Bells* was a comparative rarity. On the other hand, Gianandrea Noseda, conducting the BBC Philharmonic and Mariinsky Theatre Chorus at the BBC Proms last July, had the advantage (or burden) of a raft of illuminating performances that other conductors had given during the intervening years – the likes of Svetlanov, Bychkov and Ashkenazy.

At Noseda's concert last summer, I assumed that the programme was subsequently going into the studios rather than being recorded in situ, so, as regards the disc, I had hopes that the somewhat earthbound quality would be given a lift, that the details of Rachmaninov's orchestration would be clearer, and that the whole thing would have a more focused dramatic thrust. The fact that it was recorded live is a disappointment. True, the chorus, well-

drilled, sounds more forward than it did in the hall, and the two male soloists – tenor Misha Didyk and bass Alexei Tanovitski – have more presence. Nothing, however, could erase the wobble of the soprano Svetla Vassileva, and the whole performance sounds as though it could have done with a bit more in-depth preparatory work. If *The Bells* can musically hold its own, the patchy cantata *Spring* needs more of a helping hand than it gets here, and the *Three Russian Songs* would have benefited from more pointed orchestral detail and definition of character.

The DVD of Previn's 1973 performance is an evocative piece of nostalgia, since I was there on that occasion, too. But it is much more than that. Previn uses the English-language version, as opposed to Noseda's Russian one, but it has that palpable tingle of unfamiliar music being unveiled and given new, vibrant life. It is unlikely that Robert Tear, Sheila Armstrong or John Shirley-Quirk had been involved in *The Bells* many times before then. Their singing is of searing emotional intensity. The chorus sing with a passion. The LSO are on top form. Brian Large's visual direction is commendably unfussy, homing in on instruments as and when but chiefly leaving the performance to speak for itself – which it does with the utmost eloquence coupled with visceral excitement. Prokofiev's *Lieutenant Kijé* (recorded in 1977) and Bernstein's *Candide* Overture (1971) are bonuses but the DVD is worth it for *The Bells* alone. **Geoffrey Norris**

## Rutter

'The Colours of Christmas'

**Adam** O holy night **L. Anderson** Sleigh Ride **Britten**

A New Year Carol **Darke** In the bleak midwinter

**Gauntlett** Once in Royal David's City

**WJ Kirkpatrick** Away in a manger **Martin/Blane**

Have yourself a merry little Christmas<sup>a</sup> **L. Mason**

Joy to the world **Mendelssohn** Hark! the herald

angels sing (arr Willcocks) **Rutter** The Colours of

Christmas. Star Carol. Silent night. **Sweelinck** Hodie

Christus natus est **Tormé** The Christmas Song

**Traditional** Ding dong! Merrily on high. In dulci

jubilo. What is this lovely fragrance?. Riu riu chiu.

I wonder as I wander<sup>a</sup>. Gabriel's Message. Deck the

hall. O come, all ye faithful (arr Willcocks). The

twelve days of Christmas

<sup>a</sup>**Over the Bridge; Bach** *Choral*;

**Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / John Rutter**

Decca ⑤ 278 2129 (73' • DDD)



Familiar and unfamiliar fare from 'Mr Christmas'

If you believe that Christmas music should have a warm, comfortable feel, then this CD will fit the bill perfectly. You'll hear top-quality performances of well-known carols by Britten, Darke and Sweelinck, plus



Sir David Willcocks's two best-known carol arrangements with their world-famous descants. John Rutter's own compositions have all his recognisable trademarks, and *The Colours of Christmas* is closely akin to his earlier *Carol of the Children*. Of course, there's nothing wrong with self-plagiarisation, and this brand-new carol is an attractive addition to Rutter's Christmas collection. Together with *Star Carol*, it also displays his gift for writing appropriate words to partner the music.

Rutter is equally skilled as an arranger and orchestrator, and the ingenious use of calypso rhythms in *Ding dong! Merrily on high* is a delight. The Handelian treatment of *Joy to the world* and the light-music orchestration of *Sleigh Ride* are cleverly done. A more music-theatre style comes from the contributions of the close-harmony group *Over the Bridge*, and judging by their polished performances they may become worthy successors to the King's Singers.

The Bach Choir and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra give crisp, enthusiastic performances. The choir have superb diction, blend and ensemble, which is notable in the unaccompanied *In dulci jubilo*. Rutter takes advantage of a studio-based recording to have more flowing tempi than one would hear in a church, cathedral or college chapel. As a Christmas present for a loved one, you won't go wrong with this excellent CD.

**Christopher Nickol**

## R Strauss

'The Complete Songs, Vol 5'

Mädchenblumen, Op 22. Sechs Lieder, Op 68. Frühlingsgedränge, Op 26 No 1. Morgen!, Op 27 No 4. Hat gesagt - bleibt's nicht dabei, Op 36 No 3. Sechs Lieder, Op 37 - No 3, Meinem Kinde; No 4, Mein Auge; No 5, Herr Lenz. Junghexenlied, Op 39 No 2. Muttertändelei, Op 43 No 2. Einkehr, Op 47 No 4. Fuurf Lieder, Op 48 - No 2, Ich schwebte; No 3, Kling!

**Kiera Duffy** sop **Roger Vignoles** pf  
Hyperion © CDA67746 (63' • DDD • T/t)



A Strauss song survey reaches its fifth volume

Hyperion's complete coverage of the Richard Strauss songs – begun in Vol 1 with Christine Brewer (6/05) – has received considerable acclaim but I cannot respond quite as readily to the contribution of Kiera Duffy in Vol 5. Her accompanist, Roger Vignoles, is certainly very impressive indeed, readily catching the mood of each item and particularly sensitive in each song's beautifully conceived postlude.

The booklet-note talks about Kiera Duffy's 'gleaming high soprano' but, to my ear, the vibrato which appears in her climactic moments, and the way she swells out her tone

after beginning some notes, is less stylishly pleasing. She certainly gives a strong interpretation of the six Brentano Lieder, Op 68, with Vignoles's powerful closing accompaniment of the closing 'Lied der Frauen' a highlight. He describes this as 'a piano part worthy of Wagner's Ride of the Valkyries', and both artists are equally impressive in the strongly characterised 'Junghexenlied' ('The Young Witch's Song').

Kiera Duffy is also appealing in the gentler songs, such as the tender 'Meinem Kinde', but elsewhere at times one wishes for more varied tonal colour and less climactic passion. So although the choice of repertoire can hardly be faulted, this is a CD to approach with some caution, and perhaps a case for sampling before purchase.

**Ivan March**

## Taverner

'Imperatrix inferni - Votive Anthems & Ritual Music' Quemadmodum. Audiui vocem. Ave Dei patris filia. Dum transisset sabbatum. Mater Christi. Gaude plurimum. [Hodie nobis celorum rex...] Gloria in excelsis Deo. O splendor gloriae

**Alamire / David Skinner**

Obsidian © CD707 (70' • DDD • T/t)



Skinner's emerging ensemble takes on tricky Taverner

Taverner's motets range in scale from gorgeous miniature in *Audiui vocem* to bumbling behemoth in the shape of the early, over-extended *Ave Dei patris filia*. The latter, like the presumably early Mass *O Michael*, suggests that, with Taverner, vaulting formal ambition came first and surefootedness later. The even lengthier *Gaude plurimum* is more assured, but of the three festal antiphons recorded here only *O splendor gloriae* truly balances extroversion and self-control. The shorter works, however, are uniformly accomplished: *Mater Christi* is near perfect in its shaping and David Skinner is right to praise *Quemadmodum*, whose extraordinary concision shows how far Taverner moved from the swashbuckling vigour of his youth.

This disc's bookends, *Quemadmodum* and *O splendor gloriae*, featured on one of the greatest recordings of this repertoire, brought out more than 20 years ago by the Taverner Consort and Choir for EMI (and sadly unavailable at present). Perhaps my perception has been unduly coloured by these readings but Alamire's staid, almost reverent approach seems to me to miss the incisive quality I referred to earlier (and exemplified more recently in the Taverner anthology from the Choir of St Mary's Cathedral – Delphian, 3/10). In the longer pieces it places something of a burden on the singers (especially the higher voices), who might

more easily have beaten a way through the thickets of those long reduced sections with a slightly faster tempo. That said, Taverner's successes are Alamire's, in the main; only a stray artefact at 4'31" of *Gaude plurimum* ought to have been edited out. The singers respond in kind to the compact, reflective *Mater Christi*, and the two bookends mentioned earlier, though less often recorded, are vintage Taverner.

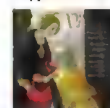
**Fabrice Fitch**

## Victoria

**Victoria** *Salve regina*. *Missa De Beata Maria Virgine*. *Missa Surge propera* **Palestrina** *Surge, propera amica mea, et veni*

**Choir of Westminster Cathedral / Martin Baker**

Hyperion © CDA67891 (68' • DDD • T/t)



Westminster forces in Victoria with Palestrina side helping

This nicely balanced programme offers the two sides of Victoria's invention in the realm of Masses. The *Missa De Beata Maria Virgine* is based on the movements of the eponymous plainchant Mass, the *Missa Surge propera* on a motet by Palestrina from the Song of Songs (which, along with Victoria's five-voice *Salve regina* setting, fills out the disc). Victoria's taste for rugged sonorities (not untypical of his compatriots) expresses itself in some of the final cadences of the former, with the third of the chord absent at the end; the latter is the more extrovert of the two, taking its cue no doubt from its model. Palestrina's striking gesture near the close, a downward figure traversing the whole of the treble's range, is often echoed, albeit sometimes in the opposite direction.

The Choir of Westminster Cathedral is on good form here, though the sound image chosen by the engineers can (on some equipment, at least) seem unduly recessed. It is unusual, perhaps, to focus on a matter of recording at the start of a review; its effect however is not insignificant, for it distances the choir to such an extent that details are sometimes lost, and the lush vibrato of some lower voices (the basses in particular) adds a further halo of imprecision. Those who prefer to view the High Renaissance through this particular prism will not be disappointed; but those for whom Victoria is a more passionate animal (consider how often he based Masses on Song of Songs motets, while steadfastly declining to use secular materials in his Masses) may have wished for something more focused. All the same, the opening *Salve regina* is nicely done, its ending poignant.

**Fabrice Fitch**

## Wolf

'The Complete Songs, Vols 1 & 2'

Mörike Lieder

Sophie Daneman *sop* Anna Grevelius *mez* James

Gilchrist *ten* Stephan Loges *bar* Sholto Kynoch *pf*

Stone Records © 2 506019 2780086/93

(oas • 78' + 77' • DDD • T/T)

Recorded live at the Holywell Music Room, Oxford, October 2010



Baritone's own label launches complete Wolf lieder survey

It is a bold venture for the young company Stone Records to set out to record the songs of Hugo Wolf complete. Recorded live at the Holywell Music Room in Oxford as part of the Oxford Lieder Festival in 2010, these first two discs offer 53 of the Lieder to words by Eduard Mörike, including some of Wolf's finest. The team of four singers is first-rate, responsive in every way, and if anything even more remarkable is the work of their pianist, Sholto Kynoch, displaying an exceptional expressive range, not only ideally agile but with the most subtle range of tone and dynamic.

The very opening song, sung by Stephan Loges, sets a deeply meditative mood, 'Der Genesene an die Hoffnung' ('He who has recovered addresses Hope'), followed by a nicely pointed account of 'Der Knabe und das Immlin' ('The boy and the bee'), sung by Sophie Daneman. Kynoch then shows his mettle in the song 'Er ists' ('Spring is here'), fresh and urgent, with an extended postlude for the pianist.

Other high spots of the first disc include 'Das verlassene Mägdlein' ('The forsaken servant-girl') from Daneman, 'Fussreise' ('A journey on foot') from Loges, 'An eine Äolsharfe' ('To an aeolian harp') from Grevelius, and 'Auf einer Wanderung' ('On a walk') beautifully sprung from James Gilchrist as well as from Kynoch, with a subtle change of mood at the end. In 'Verborgenheit' ('Seclusion'), Loges seems less happy in the lower register but he expands to a fine climax.

Loges is the soloist in 'Um Mitternacht' ('At midnight'), quite different from the Mahler setting of the same title. Gilchrist sings both contrasted settings entitled 'Auf eine Christblume' ('On a Christmas rose'), the second shorter and lighter. Daneman sings with fine purity in 'Seufzer' ('Sighs'), while the first disc is nicely rounded off by Gilchrist and Kynoch in 'Schlafendes Jesuskind' ('The sleeping Christ-child') and 'Karwoche' ('Holy Week'), with trills on the piano.

The second disc follows a similar pattern except that Gilchrist and Loges seem to have a bigger share of the memorable items. Gilchrist sings with great tenderness in 'An die Geliebte' ('To the beloved'), and he is equally impressive in 'Der Jäger' ('The huntsman')

with its distinctive, vigorous accompaniment. Loges is most sensitive in the two songs to 'Peregrina' as well as in 'Heimweh' ('Longing for home'), but it is Gilchrist who takes over the most challenging as well as the most difficult of all Wolf's songs for male voice, 'Der Feuerreiter' ('The fire-rider'), with its clanging bells and piano accompaniment even more difficult than Schubert's in 'Der Erlkönig'. There Kynoch excels himself in virtuosity, before the hushed epilogue.

Daneman conveys a sense of fantasy in the song about the water-sprite, 'Nixe Binsefuss', with Kynoch bringing a liquid quality to the rippling accompaniment. Aptly the disc ends with 'Abschied' ('Goodbye'), with Loges bringing out its quirky element, and Kynoch relishing the final waltz-like postlude, a fine conclusion. Altogether an impressive achievement from an enterprising new company. **Edward Greenfield**

## Patricia Petibon

'Melancolia'

Bacri Melodías de la melancolia, Op 119 Falla La vida breve - ¡Vivan los que rien! Giménez La tempranica - La tarántula é un bicho mú malo Gómez/Saavedra Adiós Granada<sup>a</sup> Granados Tonadillas - No 3, La maja dolorosa; No 8, El mirar de la maja Montsalvatge Cinco canciones negras - No 4, Canción de cuna; No 5, Canto negro Nin El vito<sup>a</sup> Simeón La canción del olvido - Marinela, Marinela Torroba La marchenera - Petenera Traditional Ogundé uareré<sup>b</sup> Turina Cantares Villa-Lobos Bachianas Brasileiras No 5 - Aria (Cantilena)

Patricia Petibon *sop* <sup>a</sup>Daniel Manzanar *gtr*

<sup>ab</sup>Joël Grare *perc* <sup>b</sup>Susan Manoff *pf*

Spanish National Orchestra / Josep Pons

DG © 477 9447GH (57' • DDD • T/T)



¡Viva España! A French soprano's Spanish songs

A remarkable achievement: a fan letter to Spanish music (not excluding South America or an excursion to Villa-Lobos's Brazil) including a new commission from Nicolas Bacri. It's carried out with aplomb and, as we hear in the Bacri suite of songs and Salud's aria '¡Vivan los que rien!', without fear of going into challenging or unfamiliar vocal areas. 'I didn't want to mimic a Spanish identity, but to feel it without disguising what I am,' says the singer.

The songs themselves and their sequence are chosen around the 'melancholy' theme with especial attention to the often savagely beautiful words. There's a range of accompaniments – piano and percussion (Ogundé uareré, an invocation of a Yoruba goddess), guitar and percussion (for Joaquín Nin's flamenco dance *El vito*) and various sizes of orchestra.

It's hard to cherry-pick from an album that repays frequent playing complete in

one sitting – and that it's also easy to imagine (in the best possible way) becoming a restaurant favourite. Petibon is especially effective in the zarzuela numbers (*Marinela*, *Marinela*, *Petenera* and the double-edged *La tarántula é un bicho mú malo* – the singer is bitten by the spider and it's almost funny, but she's going to die), Falla's *Vida breve* aria (what a resonant piece this is, as we heard in Opera North's 'Little Greats' season) and Bacri's 'Hay quien dice', where the French composer (b1961) takes the soprano right up into her Lulu tessitura.

Throughout, Petibon's acting and character skills evidently lift each interpretation. The recording, made in Madrid's Auditorio Nacional de Música in autumn 2010, is superbly natural with precise balance decisions made for the different accompaniments. Hugely recommended.

Mike Ashman

## 'Duetti'

Bononcini Pietoso nume arcier<sup>ab</sup>. Chi d'Amor tra le catene<sup>ab</sup> FB Conti Quando veggio un'usignolo - Quando veggio un'usignolo<sup>ab</sup> F Mancini Quanto mai saria più bello<sup>a</sup> B Marcello Chiaro e limpido fonte<sup>ab</sup>. Tirsi e Fileno - Veggio Fille<sup>ab</sup> Porpora Ecco che il primo albore<sup>a</sup> A Scarlatti Amore e Virtù - Nel cor del cor mio<sup>ab</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Max Emanuel Cencic, <sup>b</sup>Philippe Jaroussky

countertens Les Arts Florissants / William Christie

Virgin Classics © 070943-2 (74' • DDD)



Cencic and Jaroussky combine for countertenor duets

Philippe Jaroussky and Max Emanuel Cencic possess a command of a slightly higher tessitura than the alto-bound majority of countertenors. Each of them has made highly important albums championing neglected Italian Baroque repertoire – for example, both have recorded superb recitals exploring music by Caldara. The two high countertenors have worked together a few times in projects with Les Arts Florissants, and in January 2011 they and William Christie performed an illuminating selection of Italian Baroque *duetti da camera* and cantatas (the title of the disc as merely 'Duetti' is misleading).

Several duets are accompanied with sensitivity by three continuo players (cellist Jonathan Cohen, theorist Elizabeth Kenny and Christie at the keyboard), but some music also features two violinists (Hiro Kurosaki and Catherine Girard). As well as two self-contained duets by Bononcini, there are tantalising snippets from longer works by Benedetto Marcello and Alessandro Scarlatti; these decontextualised pieces are performed with atmospheric integrity and hint that it would be enjoyable to hear complete performances of their parent cantatas,



especially Francesco Bartolomeo Conti's gorgeous nightingale duet 'Quando veggo un'usignolo'. Each singer brings his individual vocal and expressive qualities to the fore in a solo cantata: Jaroussky is sweetly beguiling in Francesco Mancini's *Quanto mai saria più bello*, particularly in its opening aria featuring two violins dovetailing elegantly, whereas Cencic's theatrical talent for gutsier declamatory coloratura takes centre stage in Porpora's *Ecco che il primo albore*. Their intuitive duet-singing works charmingly, not least because the adaptable Cencic sings intimately and softly in order to match Jaroussky's gentler timbre. **David Vickers**

## 'Hidden Treasure'

**Gibbs** Songs of the Mad Sea Captain, Op 111

**Schubert** Drei Gesänge von Metastasio, D902

**Mozart** Mentre ti lascia, o figlia, K513 **Purcell** This Poet Sings (Anacreon's Defeat). Bacchus is a pow'r divine **Keel** Three Salt Water Ballads

**David Soar** bass **James Southall** pf

Resonus © RESIO103 (34' • DDD • T/t)



Songs of the sea in a bass's downloadable calling card

The digital dissemination of classical music now means that worthy artists need not go unrecorded – as in generations past. However, there's also nothing to deter ill-advised artists such as David Soar from releasing something that basically amounts to an audition recording. This 34-minute recital of music by Purcell, Mozart, Schubert and others shows Soar in hearty, robust voice, but one he uses pretty much the same way in all repertoire, and none too gracefully. His Italian language skills need work and one hopes that that coloratura technique in the Purcell selections is meant to be comedic.

The appeal here mainly lies with those who share Soar's romance for the sea. Two minor mid-20th-century composers are brought out of obscurity, Frederick Keel (1871-1954) and C Armstrong Gibbs (1889-1960), both with sets of folk-flavoured art songs that conjure up visions of windjammers and the mythical Davy Jones. Keel in particular has moments of lyrical charm with poems by John Masefield, who lived on the sea and reflects these experiences on a first-hand basis. But for those of us who prefer looking at the sea from an aeroplane window, these songs aren't so consequential and bring up long-dormant memories of 1950s Hollywood films based on Jules Verne stories. The music incorporates clichés from sea shanties but with just enough twists to distinguish themselves from the real thing.

It's hard to know just how much Soar relishes the music because everything seems so non-specifically ham-fisted – a quality that seems undiscouraged by James Southall's



Living the high life: countertenors Max Emanuel Cencic and Philippe Jaroussky

unsubtle accompaniment. As for the rest of the repertoire, the Schubert songs seem expressively vague, perhaps because he was composing to Italian words – not his first language. The Purcell songs show that composer at his earthiest in what are basically drinking songs, not dissimilar in spirit to the sea music. Therein may lie the problem: this is music to drink with, not to hear from a recording studio. **David Patrick Stearns**

## 'My true love hath my heart'

**Britten** O waly, waly. How sweet the answer. **Corpus Christi Carol**. Early one morning **Howells** King David. Come sing and dance. Gavotte. Lost Love **Ireland** Her Song. My true love hath my heart. Tryst **Gurney** Sleep. By a Bierside **Head** Foxgloves. Cotswold Love **Warlock** The First Mercy **RR Bennett** A History of the Thé dansant **Sarah Connolly** mez **Malcolm Martineau** pf Chandos © CHAN10691 (63' • DDD • T)



Connolly turns to English song with Martineau for support

Sarah Connolly, with her clear, fresh mezzo, here tackles a delightful, wide-ranging sequence of English songs, with Roger Quilter the only important name missing. The opening group features three of Benjamin Britten's distinctive folksong settings as well as the 'Corpus Christi Carol' drawn from Britten's early Nativity cantata,

*A Boy was Born*. The Howells songs come in two brief groups, including two of the composer's most moving, 'King David' and 'Come sing and dance', ending in ecstatic alleluias, movingly performed by Connolly.

The three songs in the John Ireland group include the setting of Sir Philip Sidney that gives the whole disc its title, 'My true love hath my heart', with its heartfelt climax. Ireland's 'Tryst', to words by the decadent poet AJ Symons, is then slow and intense. So is the Ivor Gurney setting of John Fletcher's 'Sleep', with his 'By a Bierside' (a Masefield setting) bringing a powerful close. This was a song written during wartime in 1915, which only came to light to be published in 1939, long after Gurney's tragic death in a mental hospital.

The first of the second group of Howells songs, 'Gavotte', brings elegant neo-classical writing, leading to the Michael Head songs, folk-like in 'Cotswold Love', and to Peter Warlock's 'The First Mercy'. The final set of four songs by Sir Richard Rodney Bennett is entitled *A History of the Thé dansant* and brings a total contrast in the foxtrot and tango rhythms typical of the composer, charming cabaret numbers that the composer himself would regularly accompany. In all these Sarah Connolly sings immaculately, with impeccably sensitive accompaniment from Malcolm Martineau, in sound both clear and perfectly balanced.

**Edward Greenfield**

# Opera



## Richard Wigmore reviews Handel's *Agrippina*:

*'True to form, Jacobs directs a larger-than-life performance of crackling theatrical energy'*

► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**



## Mike Ashman reviews Boris Godunov on DVD:

*'Konchalovsky's detailed work with his soloists has some of the over-the-top manic energy of Orson Welles'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 79**

## Bizet

*Carmen*

Béatrice Uria-Monzon *mez* ..... **Carmen**

Roberto Alagna *ten* ..... **Don José**

Marina Poplavskaya *sop* ..... **Micaëla**

Erwin Schrott *bass-bar* ..... **Escamillo**

Eliana Bayón *sop* ..... **Frasquita**

Itxaro Mendxaka *mez* ..... **Mercédès**

Marc Canturri *bar* ..... **Dancaire**

Francisco Vas *ten* ..... **Remendado**

Alex Sanmartí *bar* ..... **Morales**

Josep Ribot *bass* ..... **Zuniga**

Cor Vivaldi; Petits Cantors de Catalunya; Liceu Grand Theatre Chorus and Orchestra / Marc Piollet

Stage director **Calixto Bieito**

Video director **Pietro d'Agostino**

C Major (E) 2 DVD 707308; (E) 707404 (155' • NTSC

• 16:9 • PCM stereo, DTS 5.1 & DTS-HD MA 5.1 • O • s)

Recorded live, October 2010



**Now on DVD: Calixto Bieito updates Bizet's *Carmen***

Updating rarely makes such a seamless case for itself as in this modern Calixto Bieito production of *Carmen*. Amid the sexual confusion of the early 1970s, the famous seductive Habanera could just as easily express disgusted exasperation at love's trappings. Carmen's steely sense of liberty could be less about youthful sexual freedom than a middle-aged last chance for happiness. The question is if such viewpoints can be comparably compelling on stage and, in this DVD, on screen. And the answer is yes, thanks to a cast that are able to convincingly live their roles on stage, even if the singing isn't all it could be.

As the hippie-ish Micaëla arrives in Act 1 snapping pictures of the soldiers, one immediately discovers that it's an unusually cruel culture. A penalised soldier running laps around the regiment collapses in exhaustion. The children's chorus are girl beggars, one of whom is held back by a soldier in ways that make you fear the worst, only to have him stick a cigarette in her mouth and send her on her way.

The 40-something Carmen isn't especially beautiful, seems to live on the margins of society but is an old hand at using sex to get

to where she wants to be, which ends up being the wrong place at the wrong time. She is coerced forcibly into joining her gypsy friends in their smuggling operation. Discarding Don José for the bullfighter Escamillo seems to be her exit strategy from her life, but not much of one. As magnetic as he is, Escamillo is costumed in ways that resemble pop singer Dean Martin, and isn't nearly as cool as he thinks he is.

Much male flesh is seen along the way, especially during the Act 3 entr'acte, when a dancer strips off all of his clothes. Though Act 3 gets a bit cluttered with onstage automobiles – this band of gypsies stays on the move – the production's overall look is spare, even barren, which plays well on video. And unlike so many directors, Bieito knows when to let the opera carry any given scene. I only parted company with the giant bull silhouette that dominates the Act 3 horizon, clashing with the production's overall sense of realism.

Though Béatrice Uria-Monzon isn't out to be the world's most alluring Carmen, the fast and wide vibrato that made her voice so distinctive in her 1994 recording for Naïve is more pronounced now, throwing a smokescreen over some of Bizet's famous melodies. Roberto Alagna has always had a certain Mad Max side to his temperament that, combined with his Italianate lyric tenor, has made him one of the best Don Josés in the business. As Escamillo, Erwin Schrott uses his oily characterisation as an excuse for a lot of mannered, even slipshod singing. Maybe that plays OK in the theatre but, on camera, you wish that the normally effective conductor Marc Piollet would rein him in. I also wish Marina Poplavskaya were a cleaner-voiced Micaëla, but as the most beautiful woman in the production, you won't forget her between her first- and third-act appearances. Though the best traditional video remains the Metropolitan Opera's Richard Eyre production with Elina Garanča, this one is a bracing, convincing alternative.

**David Patrick Stearns**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Met Op, Nézet-Séguin (11/10) (DG) 073 4581GH2*

*Bordeaux: Aquitaine Nat Orch, Lombard (NAIV) V4964*

## Giordano

Andrea Chénier

Héctor Sandoval *ten* ..... **Andrea Chénier**

Norma Fantini *sop* ..... **Maddalena**

Scott Hendricks *bar* ..... **Carlo Gérard**

Rosalind Plowright *mez* ..... **Contessa de Coigny, Madelon**

..... **Bersi**

Tania Kross *mez* ..... **Bersi**

Prague Philharmonic Choir; Bregenz Festival Chorus;

Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Ulf Schirmer

Stage director **Keith Warner**

Video director **Felix Breisach**

C Major (E) 2 DVD 707908; (E) 708004

(130' • NTSC • 1080i • 16:9 • PCM stereo,

DTS 5.1 and DTS-HD MA • O • s)

Recorded live at the Bregenz Festival, 2011



**Keith Warner's Chénier on the lake at Bregenz**

British artists are good at building big weird things on Lake Constance. Such Bregenz work came from David Pountney/Stefanos Lazaridis and Richard Jones/Antony McDonald. Now leading opera-makers Keith Warner and David Fielding have conjured a deconstruction of Giordano's and Illica's snapshot of the French Revolution using one of its most iconic images, David's *Death of Marat*.

The picture's watery location both suits Bregenz's lake stage and gives Warner space to layer Illica's action. Another book (Chénier's poems, of course) gives the poet (the convincingly ardent Héctor Sandoval) his own mini-stage from which to write and lecture; back-projection illustrates his imagery. Richard Angas's major-domo/narrator/figure of death (also public prosecutor Fouquier-Tinville) stalks around with his sickle or rows intended victims of the guillotine through Marat's bath. The widow Madelon (Rosalind Plowright) harangues the mob through Marat's mouth. The crowd, prominently featuring condemned (but reprieved) mother Idia Legray, are everywhere on the stairs surrounding Marat's head.

In a booklet interview Warner talks of 'the destructive vortex' of the Revolutionary time and thinks that there are 'no characters in





Waterside revolution: Andrea Chénier at the 2011 Bregenz festival

Italian opera, apart from those of late-period Verdi, that are more convincing or who develop in such a dramatic and realistic way'. He backs this up by playing Gérard (Scott Hendricks) as neurotic and torn – rather than as the heroic Danton with whom he is often equated – while Maddalena (Norma Fantini) understands immediately the criticisms of the aristocracy inherent in Chénier's verse.

To gain more time for the show's move into the high Revolution period after Act 1 and for the aftermath of the Act 3 trial, David Blake was asked to compose short interludes quoting Revolutionary songs and with a substantial solo for Maddalena's maid Bersi. This also helps to authenticate (and de-melodramatise) the reality of the action. The only question mark about the enterprise's transfer to DVD – and this may well be endemic to the venue – is the relative weight and balance of the orchestral and choral sound which, as mixed here, lack the force of the amplified solo voices. None the less, hugely recommended – a fine mix of spectacle and intelligent interpretation.

Mike Ashman

## Handel

Agrippina

Alexandrina Pendatchanska *sop* ..... Agrippina

Jennifer Rivera *mez* ..... Nerone

Sunhae Im *sop* ..... Poppea

Marcos Fink *bass-bar* ..... Claudio

Bejun Mehta *countertenor* ..... Ottone

Neal Davies *bass-bar* ..... Pallante

Dominique Visse *countertenor* ..... Mago Narciso

Daniel Schmutzhard *bass* ..... Lesbo

Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin / René Jacobs

Harmonia Mundi ④ (3 CDs + DVD) HMC95 2088/90  
(3h 23' • DDD)



### Jacobs turns to Handel's early Venetian romp

Sensationally successful on its Venice premiere in January 1710, *Agrippina* may not be the most profound Handel opera but it is surely the most fun. Responding to Venetian taste, Handel and his (anonymous) librettist created a work with relatively few full-dress *da capo* arias but lots of short, dance-like numbers. There are no *opera seria* heroics in this fictionalised snapshot of sex and power politics in ancient Rome, centring on the machinations of the Machiavellian Agrippina to secure the throne for her son Nero. The two women in the cast, Agrippina and the sex kitten Poppea, hold all the cards, reducing one man after another to jelly. While the opera contains flashes of deeper emotion, especially where the devoted Ottone is involved, the overall tone is wryly satirical, sometimes – as in the Feydeau-esque scene where Poppea hides two mooning lovers while admitting a third to her room – tipping over into farce. In the lavishly produced

booklet René Jacobs puts his case for using an edition based on Handel's autograph rather than following the familiar revised version (recorded by Gardiner) heard at the Venice premiere. The differences are most pronounced in Act 3: if the comic-dramatic pacing of the original is snappier, we lose three fine arias, including one for Juno who, in a last-minute stroke of irony, appears as a *dea ex machina* to bless the (short-lived) marriage of Otho and Poppea.

True to form, Jacobs directs a larger-than-life performance of crackling theatrical energy, using most of the singers from the production he conducted in Berlin in 2009. The recitatives make the characters' conspiracies, confrontations and lusts vividly immediate, abetted by facetious commentaries from the varied continuo group. Purists may throw up their hands, but dull it ain't. In the arias and the brief ensembles Jacobs conducts the crack Berlin period band with his familiar mix of zest and wilfulness. His penchant for aggressively pounding accents and controversial tempo manipulations makes Gardiner sound decorous – no mean feat. More than once the hyperactive harpsichord continuo turns an aria into a jangle-fest. Yet Jacobs's manic tendencies have their point in an opera where over-the-top absurdity rules; and he never short-changes the (rare) moments of stillness such as Otho's Act 2 lament, with its grieving oboe obbligato.

Although his distinctive countertenor is less smooth than Michael Chance's on the Gardiner recording, Bejun Mehta sings this, and his dulcet aria 'Vaghe fonte', with intense involvement and eloquent phrasing. The comic double-act of Pallas and Narcissus, both hopelessly besotted by Agrippina, is played with uncaricatured relish by Neil Davies and Dominique Visse; and while slightly stretched by the subterranean notes, Marcos Fink nicely catches the mingled self-satisfaction, lechery and bemusement of the Emperor Claudius.

Sunhae Im, a Jacobs favourite, sings prettily enough. But her shallow, soubrettish tone barely suggests Poppea's sexual allure, as the richer-voiced Donna Brown does on Gardiner's recording. The impressive American mezzo Jennifer Rivera tends to make the devious, thoroughly self-centred Nero more likeable than he should be, though she certainly has the coloratura technique for her final aria, a brilliant concerto grosso for voice and instruments (she is more dramatically credible in the clips from the Berlin stage production on the bonus DVD). Derek Lee Ragin, for Gardiner, less pleasant to listen to, perhaps, leaves you in no doubt that the boy Nero is a monster in the making.

No one could ever accuse Alexandrina Pendatchanska of under-characterisation. If her chesty plunges and occasional shrieks *in alt* (she can go berserk in *da capos*) are not always easy on the ear, she sings with flame-toned, no-holds-barred intensity, feigned tenderness, too, where required. This is Agrippina's opera; and Pendatchanska remains a commanding, neurotic presence throughout. Della Jones, on the Gardiner recording, gives a performance in similar mode, though without going to Pendatchanska's extremes. Final choice between the two recordings boils down, as so often, to taste. Jacobs is undoubtedly the more viscerally exciting, though Gardiner's more balanced and subtle direction may be easier to live with in the long term. On the whole I also prefer Gardiner's cast. Avid Handelians should have both recordings, not least for the different texts they offer of Handel's first operatic triumph.

**Richard Wigmore**

*Selected comparison:*

EBS, Gardiner (6/97) (PHIL) 438 009-2PH3

## Humperdinck

*Königskinder*

**Klaus Florian Vogt** *ten*.....**King's Son**

**Juliane Banse** *sop*.....**Goose Girl**

**Christian Gerhaher** *bar*.....**Fiddler**

**Gabriele Schnaut** *sop*.....**Witch**

**Andreas Hörl** *bass*.....**Woodcutter**

**Stephan Rügamer** *ten*.....**Broom-maker**

**Sophia Schupelius** *sop*.....**Broom-maker's Daughter**

**Berlin Radio Choir; Deutsches Symphonie Orchester**

**Berlin / Ingo Metzmacher**

Crystal  N67044 (156' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin,

December 2008



### Humperdinck's King's Children live in Berlin

The standing of *Königskinder* in the Humperdinck canon has been well rehearsed. Compared with *Hänsel und Gretel*, it lacks popular appeal and is over-long, and yet it's a work with some ravishingly beautiful music. It's very much a fairy-tale for adults rather than for children.

Availability of complete recordings has been intermittent. The earliest of five is a Cologne Radio performance from 1952 conducted by Richard Kraus, with Peter Anders in glowing voice as the Prince and a young Fischer-Dieskau as the Fiddler. Among commercially made recordings, the leader has generally been considered the 1976 version from Munich under Heinz Wallberg (EMI, 8/89 – nla), with Helen Donath as the Goose Girl, Adolf Dallapozza as the Prince and Hermann Prey as the Fiddler. Neither of two more recent versions has quite managed to displace it – another from Munich under Fabio Luisi for Calig, with Dagmar Schellenberger as the Goose Girl and Thomas Moser as the Prince, and one from Montpellier under Armin Jordan for Accord with Jonas Kaufmann.

That the EMI is currently unavailable on CD is not the only reason for welcoming this newcomer as a potential new front-runner. It results from Berlin concert performances in 2008 and is beautifully conducted by Ingo Metzmacher, who admirably captures both the exquisite orchestral sound and the score's lyrical flow. Just sample, for instance, the delightfully delineated Prelude to Act 3. As Goose Girl and Prince, Banse and Vogt make a convincingly youthful pair of lovers, the former freshly lyrical, the latter winningly ardent. The real standout performance, though, is the Fiddler of Christian Gerhaher – sung with vocal precision and yet beautifully delicately shaded. The one drawback in the cast is perhaps the plummy Witch of Gabriele Schnaut.

The recording comes with a libretto in German only – though these days the internet can offer both a German/French vocal score and an English libretto. Whatever way one may choose to listen, both the opera and the recording richly reward investigation.

**Andrew Lamb**

*Selected comparisons:*

Bavarian Rad Orch, Luisi (2/92) (PROF) PH05017

Montpellier Op, Jordan (4/06) (ACCO) 476 9151

W German Rad Orch, Kraus (GALA) GL100530

## Macfarren

**Robin Hood**

**Robin Hood** *ten*.....**Nicky Spence**

**George Hulbert** *bar*.....**Sir Reginald d'Bracy**

**Louis Hurst** *bass*.....**Hugo Sompnour**

**Andrew Mackenzie-Wicks** *ten*.....**Allan-a-Dale**

**Alex Knox** *bar*.....**Much**

**Kay Jordan** *sop*.....**Marian**

**Magdalen Ashman** *mez*.....**Alice**

**John Powell Singers; Victorian Opera Chorus and Orchestra / Ronald Corp**

Naxos  2 8 660306/7 (159' • DDD)



### Corp and his merry band revive Macfarren's tale of social justice

Sir George Macfarren (1813-87) was something of a musical polymath. Having studied at the Royal Academy of Music, he eventually became its principal and professor of music at Cambridge. In the interim, he built up a career as composer, conductor, lecturer, teacher and author. He's a forgotten figure nowadays; more familiar is the name of his wife, Natalia, as a translator of opera librettos.

*Robin Hood* was produced at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1860. It was even better received than Macfarren's earlier success, *King Charles II*, and this delightful recording explains its popularity. Charming though the music is, though, it's doubtful that the opera would bear revival on stage. The libretto by John Oxenford is pure fustian, with its phrase inversions, its 'well-a-days' and 'foaming tankards'. And the dramatic pace wouldn't pass muster today: there are ensembles that advance the action but every so often Oxenford pauses for a ballad or a part-song. The opera looks towards Sullivan's tedious *Ivanhoe*; but it's perhaps better viewed as a descendant of, say, the Linleys' *The Duenna*, or *Rosina* by Shield (who also composed a *Robin Hood*).

Macfarren's hero, unusually for his day, was Mozart; but his musical ancestors here are Weber and Nicolai (the Sheriff's 'From childhood's dawn' is practically cribbed from *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor*). The Overture begins with horn calls: there's a split in the first few seconds but thereafter all is well. Nicky Spence is splendid as Robin Hood: vigorous in the ballad 'Englishmen by birth', he is eloquent in the beautiful 'My own, my guiding star', his manner recalling Richard Lewis. Kay Jordan makes a brave assault on her scena, faltering only at the hurdle of the triplets near the end. If Louis Hurst fails to convince as the villainous Sompnour, the fault lies with Macfarren's under-characterised writing. George Hulbert, loving father and vengeful official, is more successful.

The spoken dialogue is omitted but can be read online. Ronald Corp clearly loves this





PHOTOGRAPHY: U.B. FOTO

Hands up for Mayr: George Petrou recording *La Lodoiska* live in Ingolstadt

music; and if there's a touch of am-dram about the chorus, well, it's all part of the fun.

**Richard Lawrence**

## Mayr

*La Lodoiska*

**Anna Maria Panzarella** *sop* ..... **Lodoiska**  
**Elena Belfiore** *mez* ..... **Lovinski**  
**Jeremy Ovenden** *ten* ..... **Boleslao**  
**Elvira Hasanagić** *sop* ..... **Resiska**  
**Ines Reinhardt** *mez* ..... **Narseno**  
**Nam Won Huh** *ten* ..... **Radoski**  
**Marc Megele** *bass* ..... **Sigeski**  
**Marko Cilic** *bass* ..... **Giskano**

**Men's voices of the Prague Philharmonic Chorus;**

**Munich Radio Orchestra / George Petrou**

Oehms Classics © 2 OC954 (137' • DDD)

Recorded live in Ingolstadt, September 2010



**Oehms's Mayr traversal arrives at La Lodoiska**

After recording operas by Handel for Dabringhaus und Grimm, the Greek pianist and conductor George Petrou has turned his attention to a far lesser-known composer. Opera lovers owe a debt of gratitude to Giovanni Simone Mayr for teaching, encouraging and indeed promoting the work of the young Donizetti. But Mayr was a fine composer himself: having greatly enjoyed *Lodoiska*, I can't wait to hear *Medea in Corinto* and *Fedra*, already issued by Oehms. Johann

Simon Mayr was a Bavarian. Born in 1763, he was seven years younger than Mozart, seven years older than Beethoven. Although he worked in Italy – and you can see his tomb near Donizetti's in the church of S Maria Maggiore in Bergamo, where he died in 1845 – Mayr's musical language was Austro-German. There are distinct echoes of *Così fan tutte* in disc 2 track 18, and his delectable writing for woodwind and horns constantly seizes one's attention.

*Lodoiska* is a 'rescue opera', like *Fidelio* and the *Lodoiska* by Cherubini. It was staged at La Fenice in Venice in 1796, followed by productions in Vienna, Lisbon and Leghorn (Livorno); this recording is of the two-act revision, performed in 1799 at La Scala, Milan. Boleslao has imprisoned Lodoiska in his castle, intending to marry her. Her lover Lovinski gains access to the castle under an assumed name. His identity revealed, he too is imprisoned; but rescue comes from a band of Tartars led by Giskano, whom Lovinski had earlier defeated and released.

As so often, the booklet is inadequate. There's no synopsis, and a German translation of the libretto replaces the original Italian. Following the plot becomes even harder through the lack of any indication of where cuts in the printed text are made. The German gives up completely at the end, omitting the final ensemble. But the

performance is excellent. Anna Maria Panzarella's bright soprano is beautifully complemented by the darker tones of Elena Belfiore in the trouser role of Lovinski. Jeremy Ovenden makes an ideal Boleslao, his forthright tenor never less than elegant. Petrou's fortepiano continuo is as stylish as his conducting. To the artists, congratulations all round. **Richard Lawrence**

## Mussorgsky

**Boris Godunov**

**Orlin Anastassov** *bass* ..... **Boris Godunov**  
**Ian Storey** *ten* ..... **Grigory**  
**Vladimir Vaneev** *bar* ..... **Pimen**  
**Vladimir Matorin** *bass* ..... **Varlaam**  
**Peter Brondor** *ten* ..... **Shuisky**  
**Luca Casalin** *ten* ..... **Missail**  
**Pavel Zubov** *treb* ..... **Feodor**  
**Alessandra Marianelli** *sop* ..... **Xenia**  
**Elena Sommer** *mez* ..... **Nurse**  
**Nadezhda Serdjuk** *mez* ..... **Hostess**  
**Evgeny Akimov** *ten* ..... **Simpleton**  
**Vasily Ladjuk** *bar* ..... **Shchelkalov**  
**Children's Choirs of the Teatro Regio and the**  
**Giuseppe Verdi Conservatory, Turin; Chorus and**  
**Orchestra of the Teatro Regio, Turin /**  
**Gianandrea Nosedà**

*Stage director* **Andrei Konchalovsky**

*Video director* **Francesca Nesler**

Opus Arte © 2010 OA1053D; © 2010 OABD7087D

(165' • NTSC • 16:9 • PCM stereo and DTS 5.1 • 0 • s)

Recorded live, October 2010



A good choice for traditionalists: Boris Godunov at the Teatro Regio



### Konchalovsky's Turin Godunov with Nosedà at the helm

Gianandrea Nosedà's range of musical sympathies will be no surprise to British listeners of his decade's work with the BBC Philharmonic. He paces and balances *Boris* most naturally, eschewing brassy climaxes or over-melodramatic spookiness. Basing themselves on the 2007 Michael Rot edition (essentially Mussorgsky's 1869 original with the advantages of that version's economy and pace), Nosedà and Konchalovsky reverse the order of the last two scenes and add a reprise of the Simpleton's Lament to bring the curtain down.

The staging of this new production (by a veteran film director relatively new to opera) should please traditionalists with its literal evocation of late-16th-century Russian clothing, even if the make-up department have tried too hard to reproduce the skin diseases of ill-nourished peasants. Konchalovsky's detailed work with his responsive soloists has some of the over-the-top manic energy of Orson Welles in his Shakespeare films: the glinting, desperate, trapped eyes of Orlin Anastassov's Tsar and the fussy sweat-wiping mannerisms of Peter Bronder's Shuisky create an apt other-worldly presence. Both too are in fine voice. Another

Brit, Ian Storey (a Tristan and now Siegfried elsewhere), makes as much of the Pretender's part as he can, given that he loses the Polish act and the Kromi Forest scene plays here before Boris's death.

Francesca Nesler's filming is sensitive to the angles of Graziano Gregori's set and to its lighting. The release credits three performances as its source but the sound appears to have been overlaid afterwards – a little alienating in the chorus scenes. Among rival *Borises* on film, Philips's of the Andrei Tarkovsky production (with Robert Lloyd and Gergiev) and ArtHaus Musik's of the Willy Decker (Barcelona, 2004) are the most compelling. **Mike Ashman**

*Selected comparisons:*

Gergiev (10/02) (PHIL) 075 0899PH2

Weigle (ARTH) 107 237

## Angela Gheorghiu

'Homage to Maria Callas'

**Bellini** *Il pirata* - Col sorriso d'innocenza **Bizet**

*Carmen* - L'amour est un oiseau rebelle **Catalani** *La*

*Wally* - Ebben? ne andrò lontana **Cherubini** *Medea*

- Dei tuoi figli la madre **Cilea** *Adriana Lecouvreur* -

Poveri fiori **Giordano** *Andrea Chénier* - La mamma

morta **Gounod** *Faust* - O Dieu! que de bijoux!

**Leoncavallo** *Pagliacci* - Qual fiamma avea nel

guardo!...Stridono lassù **Massenet** *Le Cid* - Pleurez,

mes yeux! **Puccini** *La bohème* - Donde lieta uscì

**Saint-Saëns** *Samson et Dalila* - Mon coeur s'ouvre à

ta voix **Verdi** *La traviata* - È strano!...Ah fors'è lui

che l'anima...Follie! follie!...Sempre libera

**Angela Gheorghiu** sop

**Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Marco Armiliato**

EMI © 631509-2 (61' • DDD • T/T)



### EMI's star soprano in Callas tribute

It seems EMI are unafraid of inviting comparisons. Not only is the title of this disc 'Homage to Maria Callas' but the handsome booklet also includes mirror-image photos of the two sopranos side by side. In reality, though, the similarities are less important than the differences: Callas's repertoire was more challenging – no *Norma* or *Turandot* here – and where each of her recital discs was a portrait gallery of different characters, Gheorghiu is always recognisably herself. There are arias in which she sounds vocally fresher than Callas, notably her bright-eyed Marguerite's Jewel Song from *Faust* and Chimène's 'Pleurez mes yeux' from *Le Cid* without Callas's flapping high notes (though also without her darkly veiled sense of tragedy and emotional power). But clearly that is not all that matters.

The value of this disc lies rather in focusing on Gheorghiu herself, who must now be at the peak of her career. There are return visits to some of her signature roles, such as Mimì, Nedda and Adriana Lecouvreur, all of them sung with an urgency that has not always been evident in the opera house. Then, more intriguing, are sightings of possible new roles: Wally, wholehearted and gleaming; an inwardly sensitive Imogene in *Il pirata*; Saint-Saëns's Dalila, not an obvious choice as she is short on luscious mezzo richness of tone; and, most adventurous, Cherubini's Medea, sung in Italian, with high concentration but also passing signs of strain, as though the role is not yet 'in the voice'. Marco Armiliato's lively accompaniments second his soprano when she is at her most urgent. Together, they cap the recital with a riveting account of Violetta's Act 1 scene, where she really shines – not Callas back from the dead but Gheorghiu plain and simple, and full of life.

**Richard Fairman**

## Anna Netrebko

'Live at the Metropolitan Opera'

**Bellini** *I puritani* - Qui la voce sua soave<sup>a</sup> **Donizetti**

*Don Pasquale* - Senz'andar lungi...La moral di tutto

questo<sup>b</sup>. Lucia di Lammermoor - Eccola!...Il dolce

suono...Ardon gl'incensi<sup>c</sup> **Gounod** *Roméo et*

*Juliette*<sup>d</sup> - Va! je t'ai pardonné...Nuit d'hyménée!

Dieu! quel frisson...Amour, ranime mon courage

**Mozart** *Don Giovanni* - Vedrai, carino<sup>e</sup> **Offenbach**

*Les contes d'Hoffmann* - Pourtant, ô ma

fiancée...C'est une chanson d'amour<sup>f</sup> **Prokofiev** *War*

*and Peace* - Ya ne budu...Kak solnca za goroy<sup>g</sup>



**Puccini** *La bohème* – D'onde lieta usci; O soave fanciulla! **Verdi** *Rigoletto* – Ah, più non ragiono!  
**Anna Netrebko** *sop* with <sup>1</sup>**Nancy Fabiola Herrera**,  
<sup>2</sup>**Ekaterina Semenchuk** *mezs* <sup>3</sup>**Roberto Alagna**, <sup>4</sup>**Piotr Beczala**, <sup>5</sup>**Joseph Calleja**, <sup>6</sup>**Juan Diego Flórez**, <sup>7</sup>**Michael Myers** *tens* <sup>8</sup>**Gerald Finley**, <sup>9</sup>**Dmitri Hvorostovsky**,  
<sup>10</sup>**Mariusz Kwiecien** *bars* <sup>11</sup>**Ildar Abdrazakov**, <sup>12</sup>**Simone Alaimo** *bass-bars* <sup>13</sup>**Eric Halfvarson** *bass* <sup>14</sup>**Cecilia Brauer**  
*armonica* **Metropolitan Opera Chorus & Orchestra** /  
<sup>ch</sup> **Marco Armiliato**, <sup>15</sup>**Maurizio Benini**, <sup>16</sup>**Sylvain Cambreling**, <sup>17</sup>**Plácido Domingo**, <sup>18</sup>**Asher Fisch**, <sup>19</sup>**Valery Gergiev**, <sup>20</sup>**James Levine**, <sup>21</sup>**Patrick Summers**  
 DG © 477 9903GH (66' • DDD • T/t)  
 Recorded live 2002-10



### Netrebko plucked from live broadcasts at the Met

While Anna Netrebko continues to be an interesting player, her latest album – surely intended to be a Met 'greatest hits' – is hindered by questionable shot selection. For a first example, the New York company, even under Peter Gelb's bouncy new regime, seems hesitant about assigning repertoire-specialist conductors. So we get Wagner expert Asher Fisch leading an over-weighted performance of the Act 3 trio 'Ah, più non ragiono' from *Rigoletto* in which the fast sections are simply not together. And, although Netrebko contributes with passion, would not either of the earlier duets with father or lover, let alone 'Caro nome', have represented her Gilda better? Again, while Netrebko always is good in comedy, Benini's over-gentle pointing of the *Don Pasquale* finale is no help at making Norina's gentle rebuke of her supposed husband really fizz.

Or there can be too many stars. Gounod's 'Va! Je t'ai pardonné' *Roméo* duet has two tenors present. The one onstage (Roberto Alagna) is having a difficult afternoon for pitching; the one in the pit (Plácido Domingo, conducting) is clearly enjoying himself and the music but is following rather than leading. No problems there with Levine's accompanying of the *Hoffmann* scene, where the poet cannot stop Antonia singing, or in two *Bohème* scenes under Marco Armiliato (on more comfortable home ground here than in the *Lucia* mad scene). But DG already has a rather fine complete Netrebko *Bohème* (6/08) – without an audience drowning out the end of Act 1 – so one might ask why...

In brief, this artist continues to shine – and is well recorded here – but the package is too uneven for satisfying listening. **Mike Ashman**

### 'Slavic Opera Arias'

**Borodin** Prince Igor – For long past (Yaroslava's Aria) **Dvořák** Dimitrij – I dreamt that you were dead; He has left! Now the sacrifice is complete. *Rusalka* –

*Rusalka's Song to the Moon*; Insensible water power **Hadjiev** Maria Desislava – Veliki bozhe, chuy moyata molbal **Rimsky-Korsakov** The Snow Maiden – Prologue. The Tsar's Bride – Marfa's Aria, Act 4 **Smetana** The Bartered Bride – Oh, what grief! **Stoyanov** Hitar Petar – Zvezdite tazi noshch blestyat **Tchaikovsky** Eugene Onegin – Letter Scene. *Iolanta* – Why until now have I never known anguish?. *Mazeppa* – Sleep, my baby, my pretty. The Queen of Spades – It is close on midnight already **Krassimira Stoyanova** *sop*  
**Munich Radio Orchestra** / **Pavel Baleff**  
 Orfeo © C380 111A (80' • DDD • T)



### Bulgarian follows Franco-Italian disc with Slavic arias

Stoyanova's second recital disc for Orfeo lies more on the soprano's 'home' territory and includes two arias by fellow Bulgarian 20th-century composers Veselin Stoyanov and Parashkev Hadjiev. Stoyanova's solid technique and distinctive ability to characterise more through vocal intensity than colour suits a repertoire which constitutes a guide to Slavonic melancholy – from Borodin's Yaroslava via Tchaikovsky's Maria and Lisa to Dvořák's *Rusalka* and Xenia and Rimsky's Marfa.

Tatiana is an Eliza Doolittle role of two distinct parts. Stoyanova's success earlier this year onstage in Amsterdam (under Mariss Jansons, to be released on DVD) suggests that her weight of voice and presence are more suited to the Princess Gremina half of the evening. But the version of the *Onegin* Letter Scene with which she begins this disc has needlepoint accuracy and a well-scanned emotional range. Similarly, in *Rusalka*, she sounds more emotionally at home with the later lament (abandoned by the mortal prince, unable to return to her natural spirit world) than in the young water-sprite's invocation of the moon, but the latter is carried with off with aplomb and instinctive pacing. As the tragic Lisa (*The Queen of Spades*), the mad, poisoned Marfa (*The Tsar's Bride*) and the doomed Xenia (*Dimitrij*, Dvořák's *Boris Godunov*, still little known here), Stoyanova truly has the grand style, both in fearless voice and dramatic impersonation.

At first Pavel Baleff's conducting sounded rather remote, efficient but lacking the last degree of wind-up that many of these arias seem, especially to Western ears, to call for. But with time it's clear that this fits Stoyanova's interpretative tactics like a glove. Sound and balance are excellent. The booklet provides an unpredictable interview with the singer, Western transliterations of the sung texts and plot summaries but regrettably no translations.

**Mike Ashman**

## TUNE SURFING

One stop for American music, Boulez on Boulez, and a wealth of new opera



### American archive

When New World Records acquired the defunct Composers Recordings, Inc label in 2006 they made this unique catalogue of American music available as burn-on-demand CD-Rs – but now the label's complete output has been put on the New World Records website for download. Despite its rather Roneal name, Composers Recordings, Inc did more than it says on the tin. Founded by two composers, Otto Luening and Douglas Moore, CRI documented American music of all shapes, sizes and stylistic persuasion. The label became synonymous with Milton Babbitt, Elliott Carter and John Cage but there are jovially performed discs of Irving Berlin and Cole Porter songs, and music by the likes of Ned Rorem, David Del Tredici (his classic 'Alice' Symphony), and Jacob Druckman there for the taking, too. And many rarities and byways – there's a muscular performance of Marc Blitzstein's never-heard Piano Concerto and discs dedicated to mystical modernist Dane Rudhyar and Claudio Spies, whose music Stravinsky rated highly. Entry via the New World Records homepage: [newworldrecords.org](http://newworldrecords.org)

### Historic Boulez

Boulez's 2011 performances of *Pli selon pli* are likely to be his last word on a work he began to assemble back in 1957, and that he's revised and reassessed many times since. Although he recorded it in 2000 with soprano Christine Schäfer, many Boulezistas reckoned these new performances represented an ultimate director's cut. Either way, having Boulez's 2001 Lucerne Festival performance on the web courtesy of Arte Live Web is an omnivorous treat. [liveweb.arte.tv/fr/video/Pli\\_selon\\_Pli\\_Pierre\\_Boulez\\_Ensemble\\_Intercontemporain\\_Salle\\_Pleyel](http://liveweb.arte.tv/fr/video/Pli_selon_Pli_Pierre_Boulez_Ensemble_Intercontemporain_Salle_Pleyel)

### New opera online

The Tête à Tête opera company has been staging new opera since 1998, and has shifted its back-catalogue of new pieces to the virtual stage of clickable video clips. I've just watched Krazy Kat, where the sped-up hysterics of Joanna Lee's music seems absolutely right for the post-Tom and Jerry cat-and-mouse games of Howard Skempton's words. There are also pieces from the likes of Philip Cashion and David Bruce. [tete-a-tete.org.uk/archive](http://tete-a-tete.org.uk/archive)  
**Philip Clark**

# Books



## Mike Ashman reviews a volume comparing Wagner and Verdi

*'Can we really like – or, perhaps, use – both men's widely contrasting, perhaps mutually hostile, output at the same time?'*



## David Vickers reviews a voyage around Vivaldi

*'Some deliciously unpredictable choices make the book all the more engaging and rewarding'*

### Verdi And/Or Wagner

Two Men, Two Worlds, Two Centuries

By Peter Conrad

Thames & Hudson, HB, 384pp, £40

ISBN 978-0500515938



The title is horrible – but it gets us straight away to the point of this pre-emptive strike on two of 2013's anniversary composers. Can we really like – or, perhaps, use – both men's widely contrasting, perhaps mutually hostile output at the same time? Those who know one-time Oxford lecturer Conrad's books on cultural and literary history (Alfred Hitchcock and Orson Welles not excluded), his newspaper columns and – almost most relevantly here – his novels will know what to expect: a characteristic, often brilliant helter-skelter ride through the life, times and works of the composers, their women and their trails of posthumous influence without overmuch room for music.

Starting (and ending) in European novelistic style with an imaginary dialogue between real Venetian statues of the pair, Conrad at first seems to be falling foul of the tired old cliché of good, kind, liberal, working-man, Garibaldi-championing Verdi versus bad, mean, reactionary, snobbish, Hitler-championed Wagner. But, as the stories pile up – and this author is seriously widely read as well as being alert to relevant films, theatre and stage productions – the book's ambitious purpose becomes clear. We get nothing less than a double intellectual biography, cunningly arranged (again not without reference to the work of a novelist) by theme – 'National Characters', 'A Death and a Regeneration', 'Their Second Century'.

Let me lift a few examples, telling and less telling, of the opinions that Conrad lifts out of his comparisons. 'Wagner designed *Die Meistersinger* as a rebuttal of Italy's claim to have invented opera...a thronging open field outside Nuremberg replaces the exclusive palaces of Florence and Mantua.' Hmm – but worth discussing. 'In the (Verdi)

Requiem's "Lacrymosa" the soloists toil through their account of Judgement Day as if they were wading through an ocean of tears, and the chorus adds a wailing descant that seems to rise up from an afflicted, beleaguered world.' Seems to have strayed in from a 1967 *Observer* rock review. There are clever and original comparisons between the father/daughter relationships in *Giovanna d'Arco* (drawn by Verdi from Schiller's *Die Jungfrau von Orleans*, one of Wagner's favourite plays) and *Die Walküre* (page 211), and the coincidental obsession both composers shared with *Othello* and *Falstaff* at the ends of their lives (pages 212–15). And amusing quotes from opera-influenced novels. Lena Geyer, titular soprano heroine of a Marcia Davenport, 'chooses to protect her talent by forswearing sex. "I am only a throat," she says as she deflects a prospective lover'.

It's too early to come up with some snap judgement about the 'importance' of this book but it's certainly one fascinating enough to be scoured cover-to-cover with pencil in hand.

Mike Ashman

### The Vivaldi Compendium

By Michael Talbot

Boydell & Brewer, HB, 270pp, £50

ISBN 978-1-84383-670-4



Lexicons devoted to a composer tend to follow certain characteristics: they are usually bulky tomes supervised by editors who coordinate comprehensive dictionary entries written by a host of contributing scholars, and the end product ends up being regrettably expensive (at least at first) on account not only of their complicated and painstaking preparation but also because of the sheer bulk of the physical publication. Michael Talbot's *The Vivaldi Compendium* rewrites the rule book. This resource is slim of shape, retails at the bargain price of £50 (cheap for an academic music book of this concept and quality nowadays), and its A-Z survey

extending from 'Abate' to 'Ziani' (who might have been Vivaldi's teacher) is written entirely by Talbot.

Until now there has never been such a broad and authoritative A-Z guide to Vivaldi, notwithstanding Walter Kolneder's modest *Lübbes Vivaldi Lexicon* (1984), so this new compendium is automatically an essential purchase for anyone interested in the subject. Talbot unfailingly strikes the perfect tone between immaculate scholarly quality, methodological integrity and elegant readability, but this will be no surprise to anyone familiar with his prolific output of vital Vivaldian writings; it is an amazing testament to him that the substantial bibliography placed at the conclusion of the compendium has almost three pages devoted to his own publications. This confirms that there is nobody internationally as well-placed as Talbot to provide such a versatile and friendly guide to Vivaldi's life, his music, its reception and modern-day scholarship.

The compendium is designed to be a compact first port of call, rather than an exhaustive guide to absolutely everything relevant to the composer and his music (though it comes close enough to that in many respects). Talbot's introduction advises that this indicates merely the tip of the iceberg and acknowledges the important work of other scholars, many of whom have shared information generously: a couple of photographs of Venice and associated entries about places and institutions are indebted to Micky White's pioneering research on Vivaldi documents in Venetian archives (she is currently preparing these for her own forthcoming book).

The A-Z dictionary is delightfully diverse. There is no actual entry on 'Vivaldi, Antonio', although other less familiar members of the family get fascinating entries. Talbot instead places a tautly structured biography of the composer at the front of the compendium; he has previously published excellent summaries of Vivaldi's cluttered and chaotic career (eg the article in *New Grove*), but this fresh narrative compactly incorporates an impressive amount of new thinking and corrects small yet significant details; it also



ILLUSTRATION: THE ART ARCHIVE/ALAMY



Verdi in old age, in Venice, 1897

includes an erudite thumbnail sketch of the composer's rocky relationship with Venice.

There are facts, explanations and commentaries about all kinds of arcane and complex topics distilled down to their most accessible form – and some deliciously unpredictable choices make the book all the more engaging and rewarding. This includes some penetrating discussions of musical techniques, from the obvious ('French style', 'ritornello', 'stile antico', etc) to the obscure (such as 'acephalic reprise' and 'modally alterable themes'). Talbot writes about Vivaldi's musical connections to other major Baroque composers including Bach and Handel with a compassionate insightfulness that stretches beyond his Vivaldian credentials. Some popular sacred works for solo voice such as *Nulla in mundo pax sincera* do not receive their own individual articles although there is a short general entry about the motets, whereas the famous *Stabat mater* has its own allotted space. Psalm settings have their own individual entries, as does *Le quattro stagioni*. Naturally, the compendium

offers plenty of entries about Vivaldi the concerto composer.

There are some harmless inconsistencies about how some types of subjects are presented. Most important living Vivaldi musicologists receive entries, so we can read about how studies have been influenced by Paul Everett, Antonio Fanna, Federico Maria Sardelli and Reinhard Strohm, although amusingly there is no entry for 'Talbot, Michael'. But it is surprising that several cities where Vivaldi worked do not have their own entries: there are no articles dedicated to Mantua, Ferrara, Verona, Vienna or even Venice, although elsewhere we learn valuable things from the entries about Dresden, Brescia and even Trondheim. So, to put it another way, there is no entry about Rome, but we can read about Ryom (the Danish deviser of the RV catalogue). No doubt the self-disciplined Talbot had to draw the lines somewhere regarding content and scope that could easily have spiralled out of control and doubled the length (and price) of the book. Shrewd students who follow their noses will

realise that seemingly missing subjects usually turn out to be discussed adequately elsewhere.

The paragraph-long entries devoted to the individual operas seem short, and Talbot refers his readers to Strohm's monumental two-volume study of Vivaldi's operas (2008); editorial fairness means that the extant operas receive only slightly longer discussions than those for which the music is lost. Similarly, even Vivaldi's lost oratorios receive short entries that tantalise the imagination. Perhaps Talbot is correct to avoid getting bogged down in subjective discussion of musical virtues but I imagine a few famished Vivaldians will want greater nourishment than they receive from the brief discussion of *Orlando furioso*. Talbot occasionally offers rapid suggestions about special features in Vivaldi's music and I would have enjoyed much more of these kinds of subjective insights (from which most academics steer away completely). I have no doubt whatsoever that *The Vivaldi Compendium* will become an indispensable companion.

David Vickers

# REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of reissues and archive recordings

## Klemperer revived

A clutch of recordings from Otto Klemperer • Furtwängler duo • Danish Delius collection

Otto Klemperer has featured prominently on recent lists of reissues and CD bargains, among which Audite's 'Otto Klemperer: RIAS Recordings, Berlin, 1950-1958' has to be something of a priority, with generally warm sound quality and performances that subscribe to the familiar middle-period Klemperer template of 'power and patience'. Klemperer's reading of Beethoven's Second was always a highlight of his EMI Philharmonia cycle and this Berlin RIAS Orchestra recording from a year later is equally satisfying, even though the *Larghetto's* course lasts a mere 11'46" by comparison with a more measured 13'08" in 1958. Not that you would suspect the difference from a spot check of the movement's opening: it's a gradual process and very much in keeping with the higher intensity levels of the live performances. Similar observations might be made about the *Pastoral* and *Eroica* Symphonies, the latter in particular a superbly balanced reading, Klemperer pacing every episode with his eagle eye focused securely on the overall structure, a ploy that pays highest dividends in the last two movements, the finale a triumphant homecoming. Nowadays, so many conductors rush their fences and the music suffers because of it. The Third Piano Concerto features Hans-Erich Riebensahm as a solidly reliable soloist, the performance a good few minutes broader than the one Klemperer conducted for Barenboim in the late 1960s.

I've always had a fondness for the best of Klemperer's Mozart and was happy to encounter his well-judged RIAS renditions of Nos 29 and 38, while the fiery first movement of No 25 (the 'Little' G minor) keeps consistently to the fast lane. Mahler's Fourth, with a rather wobbly soprano Elfriede Trötschel, is warmly and often emotionally played: you can actually hear Klemperer urge his players on. Add a robust account of

Hindemith's eminently listenable 'ballet for orchestra' *Nobilissima visione* and overtures by Mozart and Beethoven and you have a generous sampling of a great conductor captured on the wing, while getting the best from a good if hardly exceptional orchestra.

More Klemperer conducting Beethoven arrives courtesy of ICA, an affable account of the Eighth Symphony with the Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra (1955), which serves as a fill-up to the main work, Mendelssohn's Overture and Incidental Music for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (also 1955). Again, the comparison with the EMI Philharmonia recording (1960) is telling, not only because of an extra adrenalin boost in Cologne but because you actually get a smidgen of extra music – the 50-second *Allegro vivace* between the 'Dance of the Clowns' and the finale which is in effect a reprise of the 'Wedding March' that quieters for a brief return of the fairy music.

Andromeda has issued a three-CD set of selected live Bruckner recordings under Klemperer, all of them fine examples of the conductor's uncompromising approach. My favourite among them is a version of the Sixth with the Concertgebouw Orchestra from 1961 (also on Music & Arts CD247) which, although less carefully prepared than the later studio version with the New Philharmonia, has a far firmer grip on the structure, its dramatic contrasts and its strategically placed shifts in pace and volume. This is especially noticeable in the first movement, which is given a magnificent reading. I'd previously bought the Berlin Philharmonic Seventh (1958) and Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestra Fourth (1954) on a Europa Musica set (051 054, which also includes a fine Eighth from 1957): both are compelling, the Fourth being one of Klemperer's most impressive Bruckner recordings. A shame that the Eighth

wasn't included, because of all the Bruckner symphonies that's the one where we really do need a livelier alternative to the conductor's late, tired EMI recording (72 as opposed to 84 minutes! – and both use the same edition).

Finally, from Guild, a real curio, Klemperer conducting Bach with the Budapest Radio Symphony Orchestra in January 1950. The highlight is undoubtedly a performance of the Fifth *Brandenburg Concerto* with pianist Annie Fischer as soloist, who is virtually the equal, in terms of elegance, energy and style, to Alfred Cortot on his delectable old pre-war recording with the École Normale. Granted, the other instrumentalists aren't up to much (the violinist Tibor Ney has his off moments), certainly not in Bach's *Magnificat*, and neither is the singing of the Budapest Chorus, though some of the soloists are good, notably the ardent tenor Lajos Somogyvári. Klemperer directs fairly fleet performances, which is more than you could say for his expansive, sweetly expressive 1945 Los Angeles Philharmonic renditions of the Air from the Third Orchestral Suite and his own arrangement for strings of 'Bist du bei mir' from the *Anna Magdalena Notebook*, both of which are cast rather in the manner of Stokowski's Bach. Interesting, though, and the sound is pretty serviceable, given its age and source.

### THE RECORDINGS

- |   |  |
|---|--|
|  | <b>'Otto Klemperer: RIAS Recordings, Berlin, 1950-1958'</b><br>Audite (M) (5) AUDITE21 408 |
|  | <b>Beethoven. Mendelssohn</b> Klemperer<br>ICA (M) ICAC5047                                |
|  | <b>Bruckner</b> Klemperer<br>Andromeda (S) (3) ANDRCD9105                                  |
|  | <b>Bach</b> Klemperer<br>Guild (S) GHCD2360  |



'Klemperer's Eroica is a superbly balanced reading, the finale a triumphant homecoming'



PHOTOGRAPHY: ERICH AUERBACH/GETTY IMAGES

# naïve a home to artists

## NEW RELEASES



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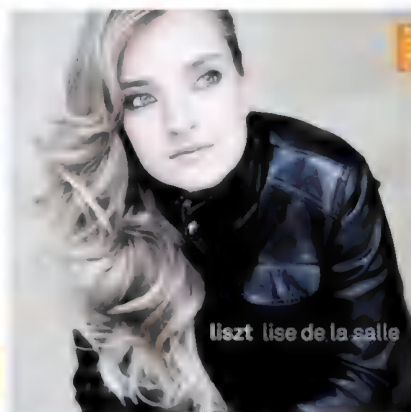
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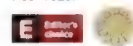
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# Furtwängler: composer-conductor

Another Beethoven Choral Symphony to add to the great German conductor's discography

Shifting through, and prioritising, a version of Beethoven's *Choral* among so many alternatives conducted by **Wilhelm Furtwängler** is difficult and, although collectors' ears will likely prick up at the arrival from the ICA label of a live 1953 Vienna recording that was previously available only in Japan, I can't imagine that the balance of recommendations will alter much as a result. The date is May 30, the forces the same as those used the following evening, May 31 (Wiener Singakademie, Vienna Philharmonic and soloists Irmgard Seefried, Rosette Anday, Anton Dermota and Paul Schöffler), a performance already available on Orfeo. (These two concerts were replacements for a series of Beethoven Nines that Furtwängler was due to conduct the previous January.) The fact that this latest release is transferred fractionally sharp will for some prove a deciding factor against, but others would be well advised to sample first. The differences in emphases between the two performances are often quite striking, though the contrasts

in sound quality would be significant for an accurate critical assessment, the Orfeo/May 31 more lively and resonant (with a far cleaner treble and greater presence), the ICA/May 30 closer balanced but set within a narrower sound frame. The impression at the start of the *Scherzo* is that on May 30 Furtwängler encouraged his strings to play with a cleaner *staccato*; the version from May 31 sounds more blurred, but listen closely and part of the effect could well be due to the strings being set further back.

Furtwängler famously considered himself a composer who conducted, rather than vice versa, and his most familiar surviving work is without question his Second Symphony. It's a lovable outpouring composed in the last year of the Second World War but that has both its head and its heart buried among the dying embers of late Romanticism. Bruckner, Strauss, Brahms and Reger are all there in attendance and, although the work is well worth sampling, one laments the fact that, while we have at least four recordings

of Furtwängler conducting it, we have none of him conducting the *Missa solennis* or *Parsifal*. The 1954 Stuttgart RSO recording of Furtwängler's Second, reissued here by Hänssler Classic, comes paired with a typically marmoreal account of Beethoven's First. Both performances are characteristic but if you already have an earlier transfer on Mediaphon (JA75 100) please don't swap it for this, which is, quite frankly, seriously substandard – strangled, excessively filtered and totally lacking in impact. A pity, because it's nice to have seven minutes' worth of Furtwängler in (German) conversation with the conductor Hans Müller-Kray, a privilege included only on the Hänssler Classic set.

## THE RECORDINGS



**Beethoven** Furtwängler  
ICA (M) ICAC5034



**Furtwängler. Beethoven** Furtwängler  
Hänssler Classic (M) (2) CD94 215

# More much-loved maestros

A trio of different approaches to transferring 78rpm discs, in music by Roussel and Delius and a feast of Beecham

The whole business of transfers seems to me about as personal as making purely musical choices. Take Mike Dutton, a real audio wizard in so many key respects, albeit with his own very distinctive style of minimising shellac surface noise. The big pay-off with him, though, is that when full-blown climaxes arrive they often sound incredibly clean and realistic, far younger than their years in fact, a good example being **Charles Munch's** vivacious 1947 Kingsway Hall recording of Bizet's *Symphony in C* with the London Philharmonic. The programming context on this new Dutton CD is Roussel – *The Spider's Feast*, Suite in F (LPO) and *Petite Suite* (Paris Conservatoire Orchestra) – and Saint-Saëns's *Danse macabre* with the Concertgebouw Orchestra. Danacord favours a less intrusive transfer technique for its admirable collection **A Delius Collection: Rare Historic Recordings**, which, although involving more obvious 'surface' imperfections, sounds pretty good. Tucked in among such lovable perennials as Constant Lambert's *La Calinda*

and Anthony Collins's *First Cuckoo* are songs with Joan Stuart, Isobel Baillie, Maggie Teyte and Heddle Nash, as well as Henry Holst playing the *Légende*, Op 48, Evelyn Howard Jones playing three piano preludes, Anthony Pini and Wilfrid Parry in the *Caprice* and *Elegy*, Barbirolli conducting *A Song of Summer* and *Two Aquarelles*, and so on.

That inimitable Delian **Sir Thomas Beecham** is the subject of a richly entertaining and often musically rewarding four-CD set from Music & Arts, three of them recorded in Toronto with the CBC and Toronto Symphony orchestras, all of it previously unreleased, the fourth featuring performances with the Royal Philharmonic. Aficionados will savour the differences between Beecham in the studio and Beecham captured live in Delius's *North Country Sketches* and Lalo's *Symphony in G* (a superb performance that I'd never encountered before), both with the RPO and in good sound. The CBC material includes well-nourished Haydn (*Symphonies* Nos 94 and 102), boisterous Handel-Beecham

(10 movements from *Love in Bath*), a hotly impassioned account of the Love Scene from Strauss's *Feuersnot*, Mozart's *Prague* Symphony and Brahms's Second which, as expected, ends in a blaze of glory.

The Toronto Symphony Concert, a sequence of familiar Beecham 'lollipops', is, in effect, the soundtrack of a telecast, complete with spoken introductions (hilarious in the case of Suppé's *Morning, Noon and Night*, but I shan't spoil the surprise) and fairly well recorded. Not everything is pristine, but it's vintage Beecham through and through. **G**

## THE RECORDINGS



**Bizet. Roussel. Saint-Saëns** Munch  
Dutton (S) CDBP9809



**'A Delius Collection: Rare Historic Recordings'**  
Danacord (M) DACOCD717



**'Beecham in Toronto'**  
Music & Arts (B) (4) CD1255

# THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

## *Lennox Berkeley in the 1940s*

Berkeley biographer **Peter Dickinson** champions a still-underrated composer and, in particular, recordings of compositions from a magnificent decade



Sir Lennox Berkeley in 1980 with his son and fellow British composer Michael: Berkeley senior studied under Boulanger and mixed with Les Six, Ravel and Stravinsky

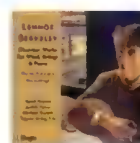
**L**ennox Berkeley (1903–89) emerged from the same generation of British composers as Tippett and Walton, all born in the first decade of the 20th century. He is important because his music is of a consistently high quality, especially the work from the middle decades such as the Piano Concerto, and he is influential because he taught several of the leading composers of the next generation.

Berkeley studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris and was her most distinguished British pupil; and, like Copland, he idolised her. He was of partly French ancestry so

his love of Fauré came naturally, and he knew and admired both Ravel and Poulenc. Neo-classical Stravinsky was an inevitable influence, but Berkeley's god was Mozart, an ideal to whom he aspired in his own music.

In truth, he has more of Mozart's stylistic elegance than the populist qualities of some of Walton or the more philosophical conundrums of Tippett. From that point of view Berkeley can seem to be elusive – his music is never over the top.

But the musical rewards are considerable as these recordings of works from only one decade – the 1940s – show. **G**



### **Chamber Works for Wind, Strings and Piano**

Regis © RRC1380

**String Trio, Op 19**

This is an expertly turned chamber work from the 1940s, on a par with the Second Quartet and with an eloquent slow movement. It's heard alongside the world-premiere recording of the Trio for flute, oboe and piano, written in 1935, as well as a lively neo-Baroque student work from even earlier, plus the Sonatina for oboe and piano, Op 61.

Tagore String Trio: Sarah Francis *ob*  
Judith Fitton *fl* Michael Dussek *pf*





### 1 Piano Works by Lennox and Michael Berkeley

Chandos © CHAN10247

**Piano Sonata; Six Preludes**

These two works show Berkeley as a virtually unrivalled British composer for the piano. The Preludes (Op 23) are frequently played, but the Sonata (Op 20) is not. This is difficult to understand as the keyboard writing and the melodic approach are invariably attractive, never turgid like Bax: perhaps only the John Ireland Sonata is a rival in the British repertoire. Excellent performances here. Margaret Fingerhut *pf*



### 8 Berkeley conducts Berkeley

Lyrta © SRCD226

**Divertimento in B flat, Op 18**

I've chosen this recording

to ensure that we get both Berkeley himself as conductor and also – and particularly – for the Divertimento, which is deftly scored in pastel shades, and where the *Scherzo* is the most substantial movement. You can also compare the Serenade for strings with Hickox's better controlled performance on the Berkeley Edition Volume 1 (see my No 2 choice).

London Philharmonic Orchestra / Berkeley



### 7 Lennox Berkeley

Naxos © 8 557324

**Sonatina for Violin and Piano, Op 17; Andantino for Cello and Piano, Op 21/2**

A delightful sonatina, engagingly played, in an attractive collection from the Australian Schirmer Ensemble, showing the international penetration of Berkeley's chamber music these days.

(The only recording with the composer as pianist is this Sonatina on Dutton CDLX7232.)

The Andantino is an arrangement by the composer of the middle section of *A Festival Anthem*.

Schirmer Ensemble



### 6 Sacred Choral Music

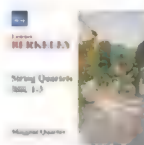
Naxos © 8 557277

**A Festival Anthem, Op 21/2**

This fine collection, admirably sung, amply demonstrates

Berkeley's success today in cathedrals and parish churches. *A Festival Anthem* was written for the enlightened series of commissions at St Matthew's, Northampton. With an exhilarating opening, a lovely central section and an important organ part, the anthem is the most substantial work on the CD.

Jonathan Vaughn *org* Choir of St John's College, Cambridge / Robinson



### 5 String Quartets Nos 1-3, Opp 6, 15 & 76

Naxos © 8 570415

**String Quartet No 2, Op 15**

This CD of all three quartets was a revelation in 2007. The First Quartet was no mere student work while the Second shows all the hallmarks of Berkeley's maturity. The writing for this piece is expert and highly idiomatic, and the central slow movement – always a special feature of any Berkeley work in sonata layout – is beautifully sustained.

Maggini Quartet



### 4 Piano Concerto in B flat, Op 29. Concerto for Two Pianos, Op 30

Lyrta © SRCD250

I make no apology for including

the first recordings of these two keyboard concertos, which remained unavailable until their transfer to CD. The Hickox recordings were made well after Berkeley's death in 1989 but Berkeley was at the sessions for the first recordings in the 1970s and was pleased with the performances.

David Wilde *pf* New Philharmonia Orch / Braithwaite: Garth Beckett, Boyd McDonald *pfs*: London Philharmonic Orchestra / Del Mar



### 3 The Berkeley Edition, Volume 6

Chandos © CHAN10408

**Concerto for Two Pianos**

This original two-movement

Concerto, written straight after the Concerto for one piano, ends with an extended theme and variations based on a memorable melody. It's the only Lennox Berkeley work on this volume of the Berkeley Edition, all the volumes of which include Michael Berkeley, but both piano concertos in their first recordings are available together (see No 4).

Kathryn Stott, Howard Shelley *pfs*

BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Hickox



### 2 The Berkeley Edition, Volume 1

Chandos © CHAN9981

**Serenade; First Symphony**

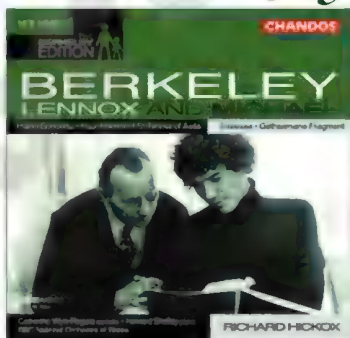
The Serenade for strings was

one of the first Berkeley pieces to become widely known and has now become a classic of the string orchestra repertoire. Three character pieces are followed by an elegiac slow movement written at the start of the war.

The four-movement First Symphony is the exuberant utterance of a young man approaching the height of his powers.

BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Hickox

## 1 The Berkeley Edition, Volume 5



Chandos © CHAN10265

**Piano Concerto; Four Poems of St Teresa of Ávila**

The Piano Concerto is one of the finest British examples. It has everything a viable concerto ought to have – memorable melodies, an excellent, idiomatic use of the soloist, an *Adagio* of emotional depth to rank with the greatest, and a fun finale impeccably played by Howard Shelley. The *Four Poems of St Teresa of Ávila* are immaculately sung by Catherine Wyn-Rogers. Utterly sympathetic performances under Hickox, who did so much to revive Berkeley for us.

Howard Shelley Catherine Wyn-Rogers

BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Hickox

### AND STEER CLEAR OF...



Kingdom/EMI © KCLCD2012

**Piano Sonata; Six Preludes**

Headington was Berkeley's first pupil at the RAM; this CD, released in 1988, has now been overtaken by my No 9 – and the first recordings by Colin Horsley, who served Berkeley with dedication for many years, are again available.

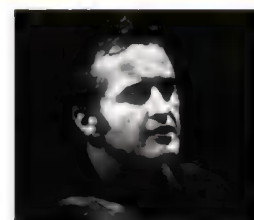
Christopher Headington *pf*



Visit the Gramophone Player at [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk) to hear a movement from the Piano Concerto, played by Howard Shelley and BBC NOW / Hickox on Chandos

### ARE YOU A SPECIALIST?

Share your recommendations for great recordings of Lennox Berkeley (from the 1940s or otherwise) on the forum at [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk) or suggest recordings featuring **Carlos Kleiber**, the subject of next issue's specialist, David Gutman.



# THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

## *Bluebeard and his wife museum*

The gothic and symbolism-ridden journey into the extensive Bluebeard's Castle discography turned into a fraught tour of two singularly tortured souls for **David Patrick Stearns**

**T**he curtains of your eyes are raised. Observe and wonder, ladies and gentlemen.' Such is the spoken introduction to Béla Bartók's only opera, *Bluebeard's Castle*, written a century ago. No encouragement is needed for wondering, especially since there's so much to observe beyond the handsomely orchestrated surfaces of an opera that grows greater as one surveys the many different points of approach over the past 60 years. Having come out of the symbolist movement, *Bluebeard's Castle* intentionally avoids adding up to a tidy, mythological package. As in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, meaning and interpretation constantly differ from one encounter to the next. To use Gertrude Stein's phrase, 'there's no there there' – there are many theres.

### A TRUE OPERA

The seemingly simple story, as told by librettist Béla Balázs, has the legendary Bluebeard leading his latest wife into his castle – an airless, lightless monolith that seems to breathe, sigh and weep (perhaps as an extension of Bluebeard's consciousness), with a series of locked doors that his bride, Judith, demands to be opened. What's behind the doors prompted some of the composer's most descriptive, imaginative orchestral music as the opera moves through a torture chamber, a war room, a garden, landholdings, a lake of

tears and, finally, the living-dead existence of his three previous wives. But is what Judith perceives really there? At one point Bluebeard asks what she's seeing, amid his anguish over what seems to be his unbreakable cycle of marriage, revelation and ultimate possession as she enters the final chamber, which, for lack of a better description, is Bluebeard's wife museum.

With mostly interior action, a length of one hour, its two-character casting and a Straussian orchestration (optionally beefed up by organ), the piece has fewer moving parts than is typical in the world of opera, and thus is encountered most often in the concert hall. That's perhaps for the best: the visual iconography associated with Bluebeard so often seems comically gothic, such as the black, plastic, bargain-basement Wagnerian collar that Kolos Kovács wears in the Solti-conducted video. A photo of the original cast is downright puzzling: Bluebeard looks like a lost boyar from *Boris Godunov*.

Nonetheless, there's no question that *Bluebeard's Castle* is a true opera. Behind the plot's simple trajectory, Bartók characterises the opera's psychological warfare with a clarity, eloquence and inventiveness that is ultimately what makes this work, completed in 1911 but subsequently revised, the composer's first masterpiece.

Yet it was slow to emerge in recordings. The opera's unbroken span of music doesn't excerpt well, and had to wait until the

post-war invention of the LP for a relatively complete recording; however, some of the early attempts were cut and performed in translations to encourage dissemination outside Hungary. Some of these remain worth hearing, proving that Bartók's opera is remarkably cosmopolitan – that is, when translations are made and sung with care.

### TRANSLATIONS

The long-out-of-print 1963 Philadelphia Orchestra English-language recording has fresh-voiced Rosalind Elias and majestic Jerome Hines wrestling with a Chester Kallman translation that attempts archaic stylisation through convoluted sentence structures, and with only superficial support from conductor Eugene Ormandy. On Chandos (conductor **Richard Farnes**), John Tomlinson and Sally Burgess have taken to heart the clear, straightforward John Lloyd Davies translation, revealing dramaturgical details that might not normally be apparent even to the most devoted Anglo listeners. Here, even the spoken prologue – which often takes on a campy resemblance to Boris Karloff introducing his 1960s TV show, *Thriller* – is a convincing scene-setter.

Translations also opened up the opera to singers who might not normally take it on. In the two German-language recordings conducted by **Ferenc Fricsay**, a youngish





PHOTOGRAPHY: LEEMAGE/LEBRECHT MUSIC & ARTS

'If you were to open the door, I should be very angry': a Gustave Doré engraving from Charles Perrault's fairy-tale *La barbe bleue* (1867)



Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau on DG is among the most ferocious Bluebeards on disc; there's no doubt that he's a killer. Hertha Töpper's voice isn't the most lustrous, though you barely notice because her use of the words is so absorbing. Fricsay's Swedish Radio recording shows young Birgit Nilsson in splendid voice, even if this future Isolde hasn't the vocal precision to get at the details. The main letdown is orchestral: the DG disc has the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra sounding a bit anaemic for lack of the organ, while Swedish Radio kept the orchestra recessed.

Other performances in translation fare less well. No doubt **Ernest Ansermet's** live 1950 performance (the Paris premiere) did great service to the opera at the time, but it survives in variable sound quality, making the conductor's orchestral wizardry only intermittently apparent and giving the smaller-scale French voices a strident edge. The Russian-language Gennady Rozhdestvensky recording – which was serviceable in the 1970s, when it was available on a super-budget Westminster LP with little competition – doesn't hold up in vocal terms. Even Russians who like their native voices must admit that there are now better specimens than Nina Poliakova and Yevgeny Kibkalo – but singing in the original Hungarian.

#### FINDING ITS LEGS

Two Hungarian-language recordings also appeared early on, but show how the opera took a while to find its legs, vocally speaking. The composer's son, sound engineer Peter Bartók, supervised **Walter Susskind's** 1953 recording, but the conductor's interpretive objectivity keeps the opera at a distance. And while Nilsson has too much voice, Susskind's Judith Hellwig has too little.

All elements seem more solidified in **János Ferencsik's** first recording (1956). Bass Mihály Székely was personally coached by

the composer, and though there are signs of advancing vocal age here (as well as in his 1962 second recording), his performance, though a bit old-fashioned and lachrymose, suggests that Bluebeard's tragedy is as great as Judith's; Bluebeard is fully aware of his evil but is unable to stop it. Klara Palánky captures Judith's hysteria in full, but without becoming strident – a particular feat considering how strongly Ferencsik characterises those passages. In the orchestra, flute, clarinet and oboe solos are like hypnotic incantations with a particularly strong whiff of Eastern exoticism.

One bellwether is the sound effects used when the castle's doors open. Some recordings use the slight sound of an exhale to a Ligetian tone cluster, or, in the case of Ormandy, a simple wind machine. The latter also has sighing female voices that grow louder and more numerous the closer you get to the final door, which opens on to the room containing the previous wives. Nice touch.

From this point, *Bluebeard* recordings become more uniformly confident, creating the proper sense of wonder even if they're – to varying degrees – outclassed elsewhere. After a particularly hypnotic reading of the prologue, the Badische Staatskapelle (an orchestra I'd never heard of, much less heard) has conductor **Günther Neuhold** serving up the orchestra's descriptive elements with great specificity, with extra personality in the incidental solos. **Marin Alsop's** Bournemouth recording is a bit slow to start, but generates a welcome, live-performance energy as it goes on. **Elihu Inbal's** recording with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra isn't particularly distinguished in any single way, but is a rock-solid and satisfying account of the work.

Only two recordings are outright dismissable. Though well reviewed in its time, the **Antal Dorati** version catches the London Symphony Orchestra (c1962) with chronic intonation problems that are particularly

exposed by the most recent audiophile remastering. Though casting includes Székely, he's better in Ferencsik's first recording; and Olga Szönyi sounds a bit green. Composer-conductor **Peter Eötvös** may well offer some singular insights in his Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra recording, but it's such a vocal torture chamber, how can you tell?

#### CONDUCTOR IN CHARGE

Several recordings are carried primarily by their conductors, and not just because the opera's orchestral presence is easily comparable to that of Strauss's *Salome*. Bluebeard's character doesn't achieve any dimension until the final scene when the upper strings (which have been lying low) suddenly flood his vocal lines, showing the profound admiration he has for his captured wives. And the entire second half of the opera – following the orchestral outburst that greet's the discovery of Bluebeard's kingdom – can lag without shrewd pacing.

Few conductors maintain such a consistently high pitch of tension as **Valery Gergiev** (working with a far better version of the LSO than Dorati's). Willard White delivers the spoken prologue, in English, as well as singing Bluebeard, creating such theatrical synergy you wonder why he's the only one on disc to do so. Gergiev's Judith, Elena Zhidkova, is tough going; not because of the typically excessive Russian vibrato, but because her characterisation is only occasionally able to peek out from behind it.

The SACD-engineered orchestral sounds in **Iván Fischer's** 2002 recording, originally made for Philips but reissued on Channel Classics, has self-recommending splendour, with Fischer also having sought out original-sounding instruments, such as a more dampened, less garish version of the xylophone. The cast has no vocal joy-killers, but also isn't competitive. Even without



#### THE HISTORIC CHOICE

**Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra / Ferencsik**

Hungaroton © HCD11001

The conductor knew Bartók, bass Mihály Székely was coached by him, and all parties are in rather good form here. This performance is probably as close to the composer's own vision as we'll ever get.



#### THE COSMOPOLITAN CHOICE

**Berlin Philharmonic Orch / Haitink**  
EMI © 556162-2

Unlike many vocal works by Bartók, this one doesn't require native blood to sound convincing. Here, amid supreme orchestral splendour, Anne Sofie von Otter is a touchingly uncomplicated Judith with a human face through the symbolist shadows.



#### THE DVD CHOICE

**London Philharmonic Orch / A Fischer**  
Kultur © DVD D4497

The consistent sureness of this Leslie Megahey film is a miracle. One of the best touches: opening the first door, Judith sees a torture chamber but all we see is blood starting to drip through the cracks. What does it mean? Hey, it's symbolist!





The Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra under Ferencsik: their 1956 recording featured woodwind solos sounding 'like hypnotic incantations with a whiff of exoticism'

SACD, **James Levine's** 2003 live recording with the Munich Philharmonic is among the best, owing to the conductor's incredibly precise ear for timbre and his knowledge of the visceral power it can wield. If there's an evolution to be found over time in *Bluebeard* recordings, it's in the use of percussion, which is fairly low-key in the early recordings but becomes increasingly prominent in the section preceding the lake of tears scene – and nobody is louder than Levine.

Nothing is wrong with Levine's singers, especially with Tomlinson reprising his Bluebeard. The prologue feels intriguingly bizarre, as if the speaker (Ors Kiszaludy) is more a shaman than a storyteller. But as good as Kremena Dilcheva often is, you can't help wishing that Jessye Norman could have been plucked out of her Chicago Symphony Orchestra recording and transplanted into this one, if only because little else about the Chicago version is on her level. As fine as the Chicago Symphony is, **Pierre Boulez's** conducting strangely lacks rhythmic impetus, and László Polgár's Bluebeard seems oddly pallid, though he treats the final scene with extraordinary tenderness.

#### JUDITH'S PREROGATIVE

The big guns of the Bluebeard discography invariably have the conductor's authority matched by whoever is singing Judith – usually with a Lieder singer's use of word colouring to project the many psychological details. Christa Ludwig has all of that and is perhaps the most

## SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



#### DATE / ARTISTS

1950	Lovano <sup>®</sup> , Gilly <sup>‡</sup> , orch / <b>Ansermet</b>
1953	Sonnerstedt <sup>®</sup> , Nilsson <sup>‡</sup> , Swedish Rad SO / <b>Fricsay</b>
1953	Koréh <sup>®</sup> , Hellwig <sup>‡</sup> , New SO / <b>Susskind</b>
1956	Székel <sup>®</sup> , Palánkay <sup>‡</sup> , Budapest PO / <b>Ferencsik</b>
1956	Fischer-Dieskau <sup>®</sup> , Töpper <sup>‡</sup> , Berlin Rad SO / <b>Fricsay</b>
1962	Székel <sup>®</sup> , Szönyi <sup>‡</sup> , LSO / <b>Dorati</b>
1965	Berry <sup>®</sup> , Ludwig <sup>‡</sup> , LSO / <b>Kertész</b>
1976	Nimsgern <sup>®</sup> , Troyanos <sup>‡</sup> , BBC SO / <b>Boulez</b>
1979	Kováts <sup>®</sup> , Sass <sup>‡</sup> , LPO / <b>Solti</b>
1979	Fischer-Dieskau <sup>®</sup> , Varady <sup>‡</sup> , Bavarian St Orch / <b>Sawallisch</b>
1981	Nesterenko <sup>®</sup> , Obratzsova <sup>‡</sup> , Hungarian St Op Orch / <b>Ferencsik</b>
1981	Kováts <sup>®</sup> , Sass <sup>‡</sup> , LPO / <b>Solti</b>
1987	Ramey <sup>®</sup> , Marton <sup>‡</sup> , Hungarian St Orch / <b>A Fischer</b>
1988	Lloyd <sup>®</sup> , Laurence <sup>‡</sup> , LPO / <b>A Fischer</b>
1992	Struckmann <sup>®</sup> , Szendrényi <sup>‡</sup> , Frankfurt Rad SO / <b>Inbal</b>
1993	Polgár <sup>®</sup> , Norman <sup>‡</sup> , Chicago SO / <b>Boulez</b>
1995	Kálmárdi <sup>®</sup> , Szendrényi <sup>‡</sup> , Badische Staatskapelle / <b>Neuhold</b>
1996	Tomlinson <sup>®</sup> , Von Otter <sup>‡</sup> , BPO / <b>Haltink</b>
2001	Fried <sup>®</sup> , Kallisch <sup>‡</sup> , Stuttgart Rad SO / <b>Eötvös</b>
2002	Polgár <sup>®</sup> , Kornlósy <sup>‡</sup> , Budapest Fest Orch / <b>I Fischer</b>
2002	Tomlinson <sup>®</sup> , Dilcheva <sup>‡</sup> , Munich PO / <b>Levine</b>
2005	Tomlinson <sup>®</sup> , Burgess <sup>‡</sup> , Op North Orch / <b>Farnes</b> (sung in English)
2007	Beláček <sup>®</sup> , Meláth <sup>‡</sup> , Bournemouth SO / <b>Alsop</b>
2009	White <sup>®</sup> , Zhidkova <sup>‡</sup> , LSO / <b>Gergiev</b>

#### RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)

Malibran	CDRG175
Bluebell	ABCD075, Opera d'Oro
Arlecchino	ARL81/2
Hungaroton	HCD11001 (5/79 <sup>†</sup> )
DG	457 756-2GOR (4/60 <sup>†</sup> )
Mercury	434 325-2MM (7/93), Brilliant Classics
Decca	466 377-2DM (4/95 <sup>†</sup> )
Sony	88697 55611-2 (3/95 <sup>†</sup> )
Decca	433 082-2DM (5/92)
DG	423 236-2GC (9/88)
Hungaroton	HCD12254-2 (7/86 <sup>†</sup> )
Decca	074 3254DH (7/08)
Sony	MK44523 (9/88 – nla)
Kultur	D4497
Denon	CO78932
DG	447 040-2GH (8/98)
Bella Musica	BMCD31 9052
EMI	556162-2 (9/96)
Hänssler Classic	CD93 070 (5/03)
Channel Classics	CCSSA90311 (A/11)
Oehms Classics	OC505 (4/05)
Chandos	CHAN3133 (7/06)
Naxos	8 660928 (2/08)
LSO Live	LSO0685 (10/09)

Key: <sup>®</sup>Bluebeard, <sup>‡</sup>Judith

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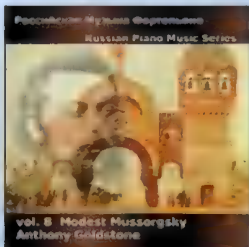
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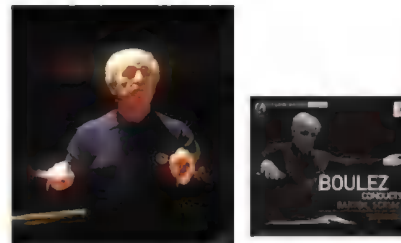
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Stage set: Gusztáv Oláh designed the monolithic castle for the work's premiere at the Budapest Opera in 1918



## THE OVERALL CHOICE

**BBC Symphony Orchestra / Boulez**

Sony © 4 88697 55611-2

How could Boulez seem unduly comfortable in Chicago but possessed by the Devil in London? Just enjoy all the care that has gone into this Sony production – with lots of atmospheric engineering touches in the right places, Tatiana Troyanos singing with accuracy and passion and Siegmund Nimsgern as the richest-voiced Bluebeard on disc.



Visit the Gramophone Player at [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk) to hear excerpts from this month's featured recordings

vocally lush Judith on record. Her then-husband, Walter Berry, was one of the more tragic Bluebeards this side of Székely. Conductor **István Kertész** found truth in every bar.

Sylvia Sass dominates **Georg Solti's** *Bluebeard*, partly because the conductor is on relatively tame form (compared to his ultra-visceral 1970s concert performance with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra). Yet this 1979 recording with the LPO maintains a significant place in the discography for having been used in the Miklós Szinetár film, which captures Sass's dramatic adeptness (even if the low-budget TV-studio sets are disappointing).

Eva Marton and Samuel Ramey were never better than in their 1987 recording, and perhaps no Judith on record uses the Hungarian language with so much well-shaded meaning and authority – with idiomatic support from **Adam Fischer**. Julia Varady is among the lightest-voiced Judiths on disc, but she makes it work in a portrayal that's a paragon of magnetic vulnerability; so much that even in her most hectoring moments with Bluebeard she remains sympathetic. Fischer-Dieskau, Varady's husband, is back in this recording, this time singing Hungarian meaningfully and with a vocal darkness I haven't heard elsewhere from him. **Wolfgang Sawallisch** is well outside his usual medium-voltage comfort zone.

Elena Obraztsova had a vibrato that could peel paint off walls, but her dramatic conviction cut through it, especially in high-chemistry moments with the great singing-actor Yevgeny Nesterenko. Meanwhile, conductor **János Ferencsik** is again in great form, projecting Bluebeard's final-scene sadness

with supreme profundity. This isn't a recording for anyone allergic to Russian voices, but nowhere else is Bluebeard's final marriage portrayed as a clash of titans.

Though Bartók's orchestration can make even the most provincial groups sound amazing, an innately amazing orchestra can create a richness of sound that's barely capturable by microphones. So it is with the Berlin Philharmonic under **Bernard Haitink**. As Judith, Anne Sofie von Otter triumphs through the power of her artistry rather than the amplitude of her voice. Her opening scenes are expressed with almost naive simplicity – explaining why she took up with Bluebeard to begin with. John Tomlinson, whose voice is better caught on the English-language version on Chandos, is still abundantly authoritative.

## BACK TO BOULEZ

Why, then, is **Pierre Boulez's** first recording the first choice? Originality. There's nothing else like it – not even his second outing in Chicago. Its virtues make a fascinating counterpoint to Iván Fischer on Channel Classics, who conducts the piece as a direct outgrowth of Wagner, gradually building the score's climaxes as one would in *Tristan und Isolde*.

Boulez, in contrast, delivers abrupt explosions of violence. The 1970s was when Boulez conducted his own works with a volatility that never let you forget about their shock value. So in *Bluebeard* he didn't build climaxes but detonated them – an approach that's also in keeping, conceptually, with the non sequiturs of symbolist drama. Tatiana Troyanos gives one of the most

vocally sure, interpretively considered performances on record. Indeed, her high C upon discovering Bluebeard's kingdom is the longest on record (particularly in contrast to Ansermet's Renée Gilly, who stabs the note and then takes a jagged, downward *glissando*). And for those who thought Boulez's tempi were invariably straight during this period of his conducting career, he's not above a *ritardando* here and there to make the music's dissonances more appropriately painful.

## LAST BUT NOT LEAST

One important postscript to this survey is Leslie Megahey's 1988 film. Though the aforementioned Szinetár video is a good 'Gray Line Tour' of the opera (visually speaking), this DVD, shot on richly textured film stock, more resourcefully externalises the opera's inner life. Robert Lloyd looks like a pained, world-weary Victorian gentleman who is watching the same horrible scenario play yet again – possibly in his head, since the opening scene shows him waking up the second that the key turns in his castle door. The vocally and visually beautiful Elizabeth Laurence is a charismatic portrait of wide-eyed wonder and obsessive determination.

One might wonder why the two characters in the opera so frequently address each other by their names, though there's nobody else in the castle. Perhaps Bluebeard is trying not to confuse Judith with his other wives? Megahey has a brilliant explanation: the characters are separated by a considerable physical distance so that they're constantly calling out to each other. Bravo! **G**



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# MUSICAL JOURNEYS

Gramophone's monthly search for the best classical music experiences around the world

## Lucerne Piano Festival

**Jed Distler** indulges in a feast of classy pianism at Switzerland's magnificent lakeside concert hall



Marc-André Hamelin tackled Liszt's daunting 'Norma' Fantasy

Since 1998, the Lucerne Piano Festival has blossomed into a late November tradition for lovers of pianists and the keyboard literature, while slowly but steadily evolving its presentational scope. No fewer than nine classical piano recitals, two orchestral concerts, two lecture/demonstrations, and a free event showcasing some of the finest European and American jazz piano talents transpired during the festival's 2011 edition (its 17th) between November 21 and 28, 2011.

The majority of the concerts take place in the Culture and Congress Centre, Lucerne's spectacular lakeside facility that houses several concert halls, spacious foyers, plus convenient bars and restaurants. The main concert hall features a 7000 cubic metre reverberation chamber around the hall's perimeter which can be gauged to increase or decrease the amount of reverberance, along with an adjustable, vertically moving acoustical canopy.

As a result, there's no such thing as a bad seat. Everything registers easily on the ear, from the full-bodied yet never banging torrents of sound unleashed by Yefim Bronfman in the Brahms F minor Sonata's gnarly outer movements and Marc-André Hamelin in Liszt's daunting *Norma* Fantasy to Yuja Wang's delicate, murmuring *pianissimos* at the outset of Beethoven's Op 27 No 2 Sonata, Maurizio Pollini's elegant cool, and the variegated sonorities Lise de la Salle conjured up in her carefully crafted Liszt recital. One section of the foyer was given over to pianos for sale, ranging from regulation Yamaha uprights to a newly refurbished, drop-dead-gorgeous nine-foot Steinway from the 1920s that once belonged to the legendary Swiss pianist Edwin Fischer. Liszt's music figured in nearly every programme in observance of the composer's recent 200th birthday year. The considerably smaller Lukaskirche, with its modern architecture and 'old school' acoustics also has provided a congenial forum for

afternoon recitals, all of which feature emerging artists on their way to major careers – and with particularly arresting results via Bertrand Chamayou's controlled, multicoloured virtuosity in Franck's *Prélude, Chorale et Fugue* and his healthy sampling from Liszt's *Années de pèlerinage*, which the pianist has recorded – stunningly – for Naïve. Indeed, his concentration and utter specificity wildly contrasted to Khatia Buniatishvili's impulsive, unruly, musically wilful joyrides through Prokofiev's Seventh Sonata and Stravinsky's *Three Movements from Petruska*.

If the classical recitals comprise the piano festival's collective heart, its vibrant soul and potential for creating community resides within Piano Off-Stage, a mini jazz piano festival featuring an eclectic array of nine mostly European-based keyboard greats. A preview concert in

*'There's no such thing as a bad seat.  
Everything registers easily on the ear'*

the main venue's expansive lounge area showcased them in solo and impromptu duo performances.

During the week the pianists performed in rotation between many of the city's bars and hotels, many of which were supplied with brand new Yamaha grands. One was the Wilden Mann (Wild Man), a one-time tavern dating back to the 1500s, that expanded into an inn in the 19th century, and finally transformed into the intimate and charming hotel it is today (the main restaurant's extraordinary venison offering is well worth the trip to Lucerne alone!). By contrast, the Radisson Blu's sleek modern architecture and intimate yet airy space proves no less comfortable than the tiny Montana Hotel bar's art deco fixtures. At nightly after-hours sessions, the pianists convened to trade solos, play duets (the extraordinary Italian jazz masters Dado Morini and Rossano Sportiello particularly dazzled, as did Berlin-based boogie-woogie virtuoso Frank Muschalle) and exchange ideas into the wee hours, creating an infectious sense of community between themselves and fans. Staggering back home, sated and bleary-eyed, Lucerne artistic director Michael Haefliger's view of the festival as a 'piano oasis' suddenly hit home.

## Malcolm Arnold Festival

**Ivan March** attends an Arnold extravaganza in the composer's home town

Sir Malcolm Arnold was once asked why he wrote symphonies, and the gist of his reply was, 'I find the height of my musical enjoyment in listening to a well-argued, thoughtful, lively and emotional piece of music played by a symphony orchestra'. He went on to say, explaining his great gift for writing melody: 'I find ideas accumulate and develop automatically. My mind seems to pick them up like a rolling snowball and eventually there are enough to form a whole work, and a whole section can take its musical form from a

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few basic intervals. I do not normally write atonal music which leads to a state of music meandering, whereas I want to write something understandable, new and simple.'

The sixth annual Malcolm Arnold Festival was organised by its director, Paul Harris in the town of the composer's birth and was held in the main auditorium and smaller underground area of the Royal and Derngate Theatre, over a three-day weekend in October 2011. Its special claim to fame was the presentation of all nine of Sir Malcolm's symphonies – an achievement unique in British music-making. Eight different semi-professional provincial orchestras of remarkably high calibre participated, including the Cambridge SO, conducted by Steve Bingham (Nos 1 and 2), the (Yorkshire) Slaithwaite PO, conducted by Benjamin Ellin (No 3), the University of London SO in the hands of Daniel Capps (No 4), the

## *Moments of violence, one female listener suggested, make this man's music'*

extraordinarily accomplished Northamptonshire County Youth Orchestra in the charge of Peter Dunkley (No 5), the Ealing Symphony Orchestra conducted by John Gibbons (No 6), the Hull Philharmonic and East Riding Youth Orchestras directed by Andrew Penny (Nos 7 and 8). To round things off, Andrew Gibbons directed the Malcolm Arnold Festival Orchestra in the profound and enigmatic Ninth Symphony. Also three engaging programmes of Arnold's whimsical chamber music for wind instruments were admirably played in the 'Underground' theatre by the excellent Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Ensemble.

Apart from the sheer enjoyment, it is a salutary experience to hear the nine symphonies in the order in which they were written and

## *The insider's guide*

Gramophone selects this month's unmissable musical events

### **6 Sydney, Opera House**

Julie Taymor's production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* travels to Australia, starring Emma Pearson as the Queen of the Night.  
[opera-australia.org.au](http://opera-australia.org.au)

### **11 Birmingham, Symphony Hall**

Symphony Hall's 21st Anniversary Festival opens with a performance of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* from Royal Opera, starring Bryn Terfel and Sir John Tomlinson. Antonio Pappano conducts.  
[thsh.co.uk](http://thsh.co.uk)

### **12 London, Kings Place**

The Vasari Singers give the opening night performance of the London A Cappella Festival, joined by the Swingle Singers.  
[kingsplace.co.uk](http://kingsplace.co.uk)

### **12 Berlin, Philharmonie**

The Berlin Philharmonic and Rundfunkchor Berlin under Daniel Barenboim perform Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* on three consecutive nights. Ian Storey sings Gerontius.  
[berliner-philharmoniker.de](http://berliner-philharmoniker.de)

### **12 Boston, Symphony Hall**

The Boston Symphony Orchestra gives the world premiere of John Harbison's Symphony No 6, commissioned as part of the orchestra's two-season survey of his works. David Zinman conducts a programme which also includes Beethoven's First Piano Concerto with Leif Ove Andsnes.  
[bso.org](http://bso.org)

### **19 Liverpool, Philharmonic Hall**

Vasily Petrenko conducts the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic in the UK premiere of Qigang Chen's *Enchantements oubliés*, plus Adams's *The Chairman Dances* and Shostakovich's *Leningrad* Symphony.  
[liverpoolphil.com](http://liverpoolphil.com)

### **19 Lisbon, Gulbenkian Foundation**

Thomas Adès joins the Chamber Orchestra of Europe to conduct his own Violin Concerto with soloist Leila Josefowicz. Also on the programme are Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été* and Sibelius's Sixth Symphony.  
[coeurope.org](http://coeurope.org)





The Hull Philharmonic and East Riding Youth orchestras join forces for Arnold

discover again how vividly original is their scoring and individually memorable are their themes. Alongside the rich, tuneful, lyrical writing, there are clashes of bold dissonance and moments of violence which one female listener suggested to me are essentially 'man's music'. These symphonies are characteristically unpredictable and hauntingly intense.

The Festival was opened by the inimitable Robert Hardy, a confirmed Arnold admirer who emphasised the composer's gift of melody, and this was echoed by John Amis who launched the proceedings on the second day. Then a whole series of distinguished contributors talked about each symphony in turn before it was played.

The weekend was unforgettably stimulating and we must hope that Paul Harris can be persuaded to repeat this wonderful Arnoldian symphonic journey next year, perhaps suggesting that each orchestra and conductor might return, but each perform a different symphony of the Arnold Nine.

**20 Oslo, Opera House**  
Norwegian Opera presents Stefan Herheim's new production of Puccini's *La bohème*, staged by the company for the first time since 1963. Ta'u Pupu'a and Marita Sølberg star.  
[opera.no](http://opera.no)

**25 Poole, Lighthouse**  
Gautier Capuçon joins the Bournemouth SO in Dvořák's Cello Concerto under conductor Kirill Karabits, alongside Sibelius's Symphony No 5. Performances take place in Poole, Cheltenham (26) and Portsmouth (27).  
[bsolive.com](http://bsolive.com)

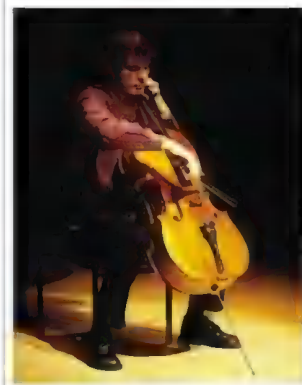
**28 Philadelphia, Academy of Music**  
The 155th Academy of Music Anniversary Concert and Ball features the Philadelphia Orchestra under director designate Yannick Nézet-Séguin with guest performers Diana Krall and Yo-Yo Ma.  
[philorch.org](http://philorch.org)

**28 Melbourne, ABC Southbank Centre**  
The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra performs newly commissioned works by four young Australian composers supported by the Cybec 21st Century Composers Program.  
[mso.com.au](http://mso.com.au)

#### EVENT OF THE MONTH

### 27 London, Southbank

The Festival for the Living is a four-day event 'that gently lifts the lid on the subject of death'. Highlights include the BBC Concert Orchestra in Mahler and Barber; and *Song of Summer*, the late Ken Russell's documentary on the final years of Delius's life. In a separate event, Julian Lloyd Webber appears in Delius's Cello Concerto with the Philharmonia on January 29.  
[southbankcentre.co.uk](http://southbankcentre.co.uk)



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HEATH STANLEY, *Earth*, August 2011, Issue 17

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MICHAEL FREMER - JUNE 2011 issue

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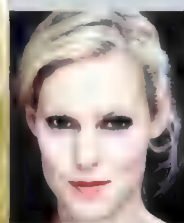
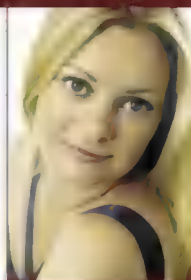
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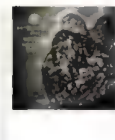
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## DECEMBER'S TEST DISCS

 Les Arts Florissants' *Lamentazione* disc on Virgin Classics has both power and subtlety as well as beautifully precise singing that will test any system

 The scope and drama of Herrmann's *Moby Dick* on Chandos is stunning in surround sound and high-resolution, but maintains its thrills at CD quality

 Intimate, wonderfully detailed and superbly recorded, the Retrospect Trio's disc of Purcell sonatas is another demonstration-quality Linn disc

'With fine products like this, pulling up the drawbridge may not be such a hardship..'

**Andrew Everard** chooses the outstanding products that justify their 2011 Audio Editor's Choice status

Despite the economic crisis, natural disasters and more, some parts of the consumer electronics market seem in rude health. Not all, mind you – major companies are struggling with the problems of making money selling televisions, and some are even rumoured to be turning their back on the business altogether. Uptake of 3D has been slow, and prices have tumbled to a point where profits are non-existent, so the big names are now looking for the Next Big Thing, whether it's ever more connected TVs, or the long-awaited organic LED technology.

In the audio world, however, streaming and computer storage is in full swing, and there's now a range of products to tempt the

buyer from entry-level to high-end. Marantz showed the way to mass acceptance with its M-CR603 'Melody Media' system, reviewed in February 2011: a compact micro with a big sound, combining a tuner/amplifier with CD playback, iPod connectivity and both network and AirPlay music-streaming capability.

For those wanting to add music-streaming to an existing system, Cambridge Audio came up with a cost-effective solution in the form of its little Sonata NP30 media player, reviewed in October, while Naim continues to show just what streamed music can do with its flagship NDX player, reviewed in June, sitting atop the company's fast-growing range of network player products.

Onkyo moved network capability down its home cinema amplifier range with the arrival of the TX-NR609, and as we discovered in June, this is an affordable multichannel amplifier once and for all capable of dismissing the idea that for good stereo sound only a dedicated two-channel amp will do.

Also concentrating on stereo quality was Marantz brand ambassador Ken Ishiwata, who worked with an international team to tune a new range of speakers from Boston Acoustics. We looked at the A25 model in the October issue, and found a quite remarkable design offering superb quality for the money, well worthy of the attention of any first-time buyer or upgrader.

The financial commentators would have us believe there's an element of hunkering down and staycationing going on – so, with fine products such as this handful I've chosen as my 2011 favourites, pulling up the drawbridge may not be too much of a hardship.



- 1 Showing how much streamed music offers, the £2995 **Naim NDX** is suited to top-notch systems
- 2 Home cinema meets network music in an affordable package: the £500 **Onkyo TX-NR609**
- 3 To add network music to your system on a budget, the £400 **Cambridge Audio NP30** is ideal
- 4 Network music, CD and Apple AirPlay in one affordable box: the £500 **Marantz M-CR603**
- 5 Making more of the budget: the excellent **Boston Acoustics A25** speakers are just £200/pr

## REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

# T+A Music Receiver

Behind the prosaic name you'll find a highly accomplished all-in-one, says **Andrew Everard**

The consumer electronics industry tends to saddle products with labels from the unfathomable – what is a UE46B8000, and how does it differ from a UE46D7000? – to the bizarre. Does anyone fancy a pair of Totem Element Fires or a Dr Feickert Analogue Woodpecker, for example?

So it's a relief when a new product's designation just says what it does, and that's the case with the latest arrival from German audio company T+A. In fact, 'Music Receiver' rather understates matters: here we have amplifier, tuner, CD player and streaming music client in one impeccably finished slab.

Selling for £2690 through UK distributor Acoustic Brands Ltd, the Music Receiver is, like T+A's other products, made in Germany at the company's own factory – there is no outsourcing of production here, and a high degree of hand-working has been involved.

Based in Herford, Eastern Westphalia, since 1978, T+A takes its name from 'Theorie und Anwendung', or 'theory and application', in electronic and acoustic design. Founded by physicist Siegfried Amft, who still runs the show, it began as a speaker manufacturer, then moved on to electronics, and its products are all about simplicity, clean lines and quality.

Though relatively compact – especially when you consider what's crammed inside, including an amp capable of almost 100W per channel – the Music Receiver arrived in a fairly huge double-skinned box, and even unboxing it showed how well-considered is every element of the company's operation. It's all about attention to detail, you see.

That's immediately apparent in the fit and finish of the controls, and the quality of the casework. The chassis is heavy steel to damp out vibrations, aided by pressure-cast side



### T+A MUSIC RECEIVER NETWORK STREAMING RECEIVER

**Price** £2690

**Built-in sources** CD player, FM/internet radio tuner, streaming client

**Digital audio inputs** Three electrical, two optical, two USB (for iOS devices and USB memory)

**Digital audio output** Electrical analogue, audio inputs, two line, tape

**Analogue audio outs** Line, tape, preamplifier output, two subwoofer outs, one pair of speakers

**Other connections** Ethernet, Wi-Fi antenna, FM antenna, RS232

**Power output** 94Wpc into 8ohms, 160Wpc into 4ohms

**Streaming formats** MP3, WMA, AAC, OGG-Vorbis, FLAC (96/24 via LAN), WAV (96/24 via LAN)

**Accessories supplied** Remote handset, antennae

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 44x12x39cm  
**ta-hifi.com**

panels and a wraparound aluminium front panel and cover, giving the unit a feeling of being more 'of a piece' than conventional 'front, sides and lid' designs. You can have the product in black or silver, or black with silver side panels or vice versa, all at the same price.

As well as the front-loading CD mechanism, internal FM tuner and streaming/internet radio capability, the T+A is designed to function as a complete system hub: it has seven digital audio inputs, three analogue line-ins, and tape, line out, preamp out and two subwoofer outputs, plus a digital audio output.

Good quality speaker terminals, able to take banana plugs, bare wires or spades, sit on the end of amplification able to deliver 94W per channel into 8ohms, or 160Wpc into 4ohms.

The amplification uses the company's Pulse Width Modulation output stage which, it says, 'eliminates any problems caused by voltage fluctuations in the mains power supply, and thereby excludes the possibility of signal distortion induced by the power supply voltage'. This combines with a high-power toroidal transformer and in-house switch-mode circuits using fast MOSFET transistors

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## SUGGESTED PARTNERS

With no shortage of power, and a high-quality sound, the T+A can drive very good speakers



### MONITOR AUDIO GX100

Top-notch standmount speakers are one option, and they don't come much better for the money than Monitor Audio's ribbon-tweetered £1250 marvels



### PMC GB1

At £1675 a pair, these are the baby standmounters in PMC's domestic range, but that doesn't stop them delivering a well-weighted sound packed with detail and an ability to thrill

and high-energy intelligent driver modules to give an amplifier section designed to drive demanding speaker loads with ease.

The streaming board is a T+A original, handling music in MP3, WMA, AAC, OGG-Vorbis, FLAC and WAV, with 96kHz/24-bit FLAC and WAV possible over wired Ethernet.

## PERFORMANCE

While I had the T+A for review, I was asked, 'So what's it up against?' The most obvious rival seems to be the original Naim Uniti, which also has streaming capability and a CD player. On paper at least, the Music Receiver has its British rival beaten for input flexibility,

or two of listening demonstrated that the T+A was more than capable of driving the larger OB1 speakers, and controlling them well.

The sound is best described as big and bold, offering warmth and finesse even from great sweeping pieces such as the Chandos recording of Herrmann's *Moby Dick*. Instruments and voices are clean and precise, but there's none of that slight sterility some (mistakenly) consider to be 'the German sound'.

Instead the T+A can sound lush when asked, that seemingly unburstable power allowing it to deliver large-scale orchestral music with almost disdainful ease and not a hint of hardening-up. And it's also capable of driving

*'The T+A's seemingly unburstable power allows it to deliver large-scale orchestral music without a hint of hardening-up'*

not to mention amplifier power (in which respects it's closer to the SuperUniti), while some buyers will find its styling more room-friendly than Naim's purposeful matt black.

The whole enterprise has a feeling of precision and smoothness about it, the way controls operate and the logic of the menu system making it a pleasure to use, while a comprehensive, no-nonsense instruction book also makes it easy to understand.

The T+A provides both wireless and wired networking, the latter being available only if there's no Ethernet hook-up, which I think suggests wired operation is the preference. To ensure stability that's what I stuck to, although some brief listening sessions with wireless working revealed no problems at all.

Having tried a variety of affordable speakers, I again settled for the compact PMC GB1 floorstanders I find work so well with many systems of this kind, even though an evening

rhythms really hard when the music demands, and delivering excellent snap and speed.

Indeed, the T+A is wonderfully expressive and free-flowing, and with the right recordings can give a sense of focus and intimacy likely to elude all but the very best of its rivals. It's a really exciting listen, and there's no sense of impending disaster.

The Music Receiver lacks iOS or Android apps to drive it – I'm told one is on the way – but it can act as a UPnP receiver: using the open source Kinsky software on my MacBook, or even an iPod Touch or iPad running Kinsky, Twonky or PlugPlayer, it was simple to build a playlist and 'push' music to it.

Add to that a large, clear white-on-black display, with highlighted information shown double-size to ensure legibility, and you have a big, impressive, confidence-inspiring addition to the streaming music arena. It's well worth seeking out for a long, careful listen. **G**

## DESIGN NOTES

### Siggi Amft

**On Karajan and Hendrix and why quality is the future of streaming**



Siegfried 'Siggi' Amft founded T+A in Herford, Westphalia in 1978, originally working in sound technology, expanding into loudspeakers, then in 1986 launching its Pulsar series of amplifiers. The company believes in handmade products, all still built in Germany, and long product cycles – not for T+A the 'replace it every year' way of thinking.

He learned violin as a boy, and says that has instilled in him a love of Monteverdi, Beethoven and Brahms. He also recalls concerts given by the Westfälische Kantorei, a leading sacred music choir based in Herford, which his company supports.

His all-time memorable musical events? Amft includes the New Year's Concert in Vienna, the Berlin Philharmonic under Karajan, 'and – a long time ago – Hendrix live'.

Asked about the move from CD to streaming, Amft admits he still likes LP the most, and says that in digital, he listens to 'CD-quality as a minimum, SACD and high resolution streaming formats'.

And will the CD survive? 'It will still be important and survive like vinyl, but selling in much smaller quantities. There's a huge number of CDs on the market, and nobody will throw them away.'

'Older people like me still like to own discs, younger people less so. But as long as the streamed audio files are of high quality, that's OK for me.'

**'There's a huge number of CDs on the market and nobody will throw them away...'**

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# Are You Buying Pre-Ruined

## The Music Chain

Much is written about music and the musicians who entertain us, and we rightly exalt great musicians. But there is an interlinked chain of participants, two of which are I believe are crucial to our music scene in today's world. For centuries the music chain was a very short one – composers or songwriters, musicians and listeners, and the judgement on quality was immediate. Recording technologies have changed all this exponentially.

Today, we listen to most of our music from a recording and this gives recording engineers the opportunity to avoid poor acoustics, duff notes and off days. This, of course, means the chain has grown to include the recording engineers, the music distribution system (retailers or downloads), hi-fi manufacturers, hi-fi sellers and the hi-fi purchasers, the latter being the listeners. I should start by saying that hi-fi has become an adulterated term that no longer has its original meaning because it's applied to much equipment that certainly should not be termed high-fidelity.

It's said that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link. However, I believe there are two particularly strong links that, if removed from the chain, would seriously damage the quality of recorded music. These are the audiophile, or hi-fi connoisseur, and the specialist hi-fi retailer, the latter in nearly all cases also being the former because it's their interest that has driven them into their particular business. These are the people who most appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver an emotional experience.

## Hi-Fi Connoisseurs

So why is the hi-fi connoisseur so important to the music industry? By their nature, audiophiles are generally avid music lovers who enhance their enjoyment through listening to music at its very best quality level, which means playing great recordings

through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without the audiophile, the main driver for quality would probably be removed from the chain. Let's be honest, over recent years the majority of music listeners now settle for MP3 convenience and, therefore, mediocre sound quality, that is 'pre-ruined' music. If the pendulum ever swings so far that all but a few listen to highly compressed formats such as MP3, music producers will not waste their resources on producing high quality recordings because it would be commercially unnecessary, even if their recording engineers wanted to achieve the best they could. After all, an MP3 or AAC file, the iTunes default format, downloaded at 128 kbps (the most popular download speed), is about one-eleventh the size of a full resolution CD track, 1411 kbps, so the quality is inevitably far inferior. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. Using an iPod while jogging does not really raise a quality issue but playing low-resolution tracks through an iPod docking station that feeds into a decent hi-fi system, is a disaster area. It's rubbish quality made louder. Fortunately, there is still significant demand from audiophiles committed to sound quality to sustain the production of high quality recordings, but it would be a tragedy if there weren't. For example, most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file are a complete waste of time because there is so much information missing that they are reduced to just the essence of a tune.

## Specialist Hi-Fi Retailers

Just as essential a link in the chain as the hi-fi connoisseur is the specialist hi-fi retailer and the two are rightly dependent on each other. Without the specialist retailer the hi-end hi-fi manufacturer would have to rely on the internet and hi-fi magazine reviewers to try and assess the relative merits and

performance of their products against that of their competitors – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. Specialist hi-fi retailers are constantly being offered new products for assessment and potential stocking and, as it is also their hobby as well as their livelihood, they are greatly interested in achieving the best performance and seeking out the most outstanding products and combinations. More than that though is their relationship with audiophiles for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers are essential to each other.

## Future of Recorded Music

What are the future prospects of maintaining high quality music recordings? We must hope that audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, or perhaps most accurately described, music lovers, will continue to drive the demand for quality. But another important reason for hope within the mass-market is that there is no longer any over-riding reason for MP3 and AAC to have such a following. These formats were designed to overcome very slow download speeds and expensive memory capacity. These are not significant factors for most people now. Full resolution, CD quality, downloads are already available and should become the norm as long as the general public can be made aware of the tremendous quality benefit. This has happened with HD TV so we know this awareness can grow rapidly. In the meantime, we must highly value hi-fi connoisseurs and specialist hi-fi retailers, of which the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest. Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.



# Music?



The specialist dealers below have been selected because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

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[www.infidelity.co.uk](http://www.infidelity.co.uk)

#### Maidenhead

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t: 01628 633995  
[www.audiovenue.com](http://www.audiovenue.com)

#### Rayleigh, Essex

RAYLEIGH HI-FI  
44a High Street.  
t: 01268 779762  
[www.rayleighhi-fi.com](http://www.rayleighhi-fi.com)  
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RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION  
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t: 01702 435255  
[www.rayleighhi-fi.com](http://www.rayleighhi-fi.com)

### LONDON

#### Ealing

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### SOUTH WEST

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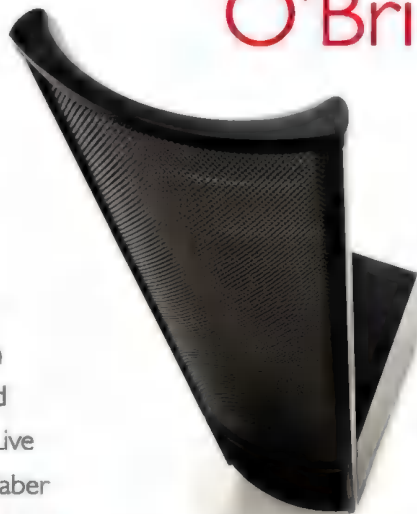
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## REVIEW PMC TWENTY.21

# Compact speakers put a new slant on the music

The baby model in PMC's anniversary range is powerful and vibrant, says **Tony Williams**

The past 12 months have been packed with hi-fi anniversaries: Pro-ject celebrated 20 years in business with an event in Vienna, KEF held a lunch in London to mark its half-century, and even the iPod reached its 10th birthday.

PMC hit 20 with a celebratory speaker range, the 'twenty' series. Built after consultation with distributors, retailers and users, and designed to fit between its current 'i'-series models and the 'fact' range, the four-strong line-up draws on the company's studio and domestic speaker experience.

There's a passing resemblance to the 'i' models, until you notice that these ones have slanted front and rear panels to allow time-alignment of the drivers and to break up internal standing waves. In fact, only one component is carried over: the fixings for the mid/bass drivers. What's more, these speakers are almost entirely made in Britain.

At £1375/pr, the twenty.21 is the smallest speaker in the range, using the new 27mm soft-dome Sonolex tweeter found across the range. Mounted in a resonance chamber to lower the crossover point to 1.8kHz, the tweeter has a dispersion grille in front, helping the precision of the soundstage when the speaker is listened to off-axis.

The 14cm mid/bass unit is derived from the one used in the 'fact' speakers: it has a hand-doped paper cone, and is tuned with an improved version of PMC's Advanced Transmission Line, lined with upgraded foam and venting to the front to allow greater flexibility of placement.

The new crossover is hand-built, and has beefed-up copper tracks for current-handling plus gold through-plating for the optimal positioning of components and the binding-post terminals mounted directly



### PMC TWENTY.21 STANDMOUNT SPEAKERS

**Price** £1375/pr

**Drive units** 27mm Sonolex soft/dome tweeter, 14cm paper cone mid/bass

**Frequency response** 50Hz-25kHz  
Impedance 8ohms

**Sensitivity** 87dB/W/m

**Finishes** Oak, walnut or amarone real wood veneers; Diamond Black high gloss at £1485/pr

**Dimensions** (HxWxD) 32.5x15.2x27.7cm  
(28.3cm with grille)

[pmc-speakers.com](http://pmc-speakers.com)

to it. The cabinets are made from 18mm high-density fibreboard, and have extensive bracing – especially inside the top-plate of the enclosure, the 'first point of impact' for bass frequencies within the transmission line. They come in a choice of real wood veneers or – at a premium – in high-gloss Diamond Black, with matched stands at £295/pr.

### PERFORMANCE

The twenty.21s are fast, involving, dynamic, and produce more bass of much better quality than speakers just 32.5cm tall have any right to claim. In other words, they're like the celebrated DB1i speakers, only more so. I tried them with a range of amplifiers, from budget to heavyweight, and while they're at home on the end of a high-quality bargain amplifier such as the Marantz PM6004, they really thrive with something a bit harder-hitting – for example Naim's all-in-one SuperUniti.

The treble is wide-open, drawing out bags of character and ambience, and yet always remaining sweet and smooth, while the design conveys a solid, stable soundstage picture, even off-axis. Integration between the tweeter and mid/bass driver is seamless, giving excellent vocal and instrumental timbres, and the weight

is truly remarkable, which becomes clear when you play large-scale orchestral or choral music through them.

Given the season, I've just been listening to the first part of Handel's *Messiah* – the Dunedin Consort recording on Linn, in its 88.2kHz/24-bit high-resolution version – and the ability of the PMCs, on the end of the SuperUniti, to bring out the drama and scale of the performance is remarkably addictive. They're sprightly, beautifully weighted and sweet, while also being highly revealing.

Perhaps the 'lean-back' styling won't please every taste, but I can see no such doubts being raised by the sound of the twenty.21s: these are superb little speakers, and recommended without reservation. **G**



### HOW TO TEST...

The new PMCs are all about speed, detail and expression: test them with a first-rate disc such as the Retrospect Trio's excellent Purcell sonatas set on Linn Records – along with high-quality electronics – and it's not hard to appreciate what makes them such special small speakers

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● **ESSAY**

# The end of the CD isn't nigh (well, not just yet, anyway)

Despite panicked reports to the contrary and a flurry of online speculation, the CD is far from becoming obsolete, says **Andrew Everard**

We've just had another one of those panic-flurries that seem to run through the audio and music industries from time to time: 'The end of the CD is nigh' headlines popped up all over the place, as the wonderful world of the internet seized on a highly speculative piece published by an online music magazine, quoting as its only source one of its own journalists.

'The major labels,' the article claimed, 'plan to abandon the CD format by the end of 2012 (or even earlier) and replace it with download/stream-only releases via iTunes and related music services. The only CD formats that will be left over will be the limited edition ones, which will of course not be available for every artist. The distribution model for these remaining CD releases would be primarily Amazon which is already the biggest CD retailer worldwide anyhow.'

Good for Amazon, I guess, and bright news for those either selling music online or offering streaming services – and that means everyone from Apple to Google to Spotify and more – but not so clever if you're a major

'Yes, there are some labels offering content at CD quality, or even higher resolution, but heavens does it take a long time to download'

music retailer of the 'bricks and mortar' kind, let alone one of the small, independent specialist CD stores on which so many classical music enthusiasts depend for suggestions and sourcing of more obscure recordings.

The article went on to say that it had tried getting feedback from EMI, Universal and Sony, but all declined to comment. And we know what a refusal to comment means, don't we? In the often strange and twisted logic of the internet, it must be true.

Thing is, we've been here before, when Linn announced it was no longer going to make CD players, instead concentrating on its rapidly growing range of DS-range music-streaming products. Again the 'end of the CD' headlines spread like wildfire around the interweb – until Linn's Gilad Tiefenbrun pointed out that he didn't say he was going to stop buying CDs (well he wouldn't, given that the company

includes the 2010 *Gramophone* Classical Label of the Year), but that he would buy them, rip them and then enjoy them on his shiny new Linn DS system.

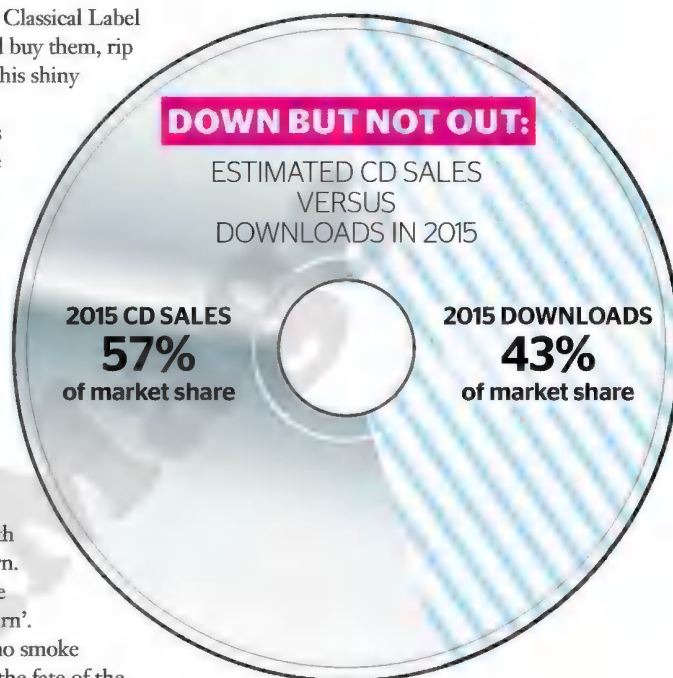
Even in these pages, Naim's technical director Roy George suggested only a couple of months ago that most of the company's R&D effort was going into streaming technology at the moment, but with a clear implication this was due to limited – though growing – resources. He didn't rule out future CD hardware development but there was a clear implication that, while CD is quite a mature technology, with streaming there's much to learn. As George put it, 'the more we know, the more we have to learn'.

Yes, yes, but surely there's no smoke without fire when it comes to the fate of the CD? After all, the sales figures suggest digital downloads are rising apace, while sales of 'physical media' are taking a big hit.

Well, yes, but look closer at the numbers and things aren't quite as black and white as they may initially seem: industry analyst Gartner says that 'In the past 10 years, CD sales, the largest revenue stream for the industry, have eroded, while the online music revenue share is rapidly increasing' – but it's going to take quite a while before the two graphs cross.

To quote Gartner's figures, 'Worldwide online music revenue from end-user spending is on pace to total \$6.3 billion in 2011, up from \$5.9 billion in 2010. Online music revenue is forecast to reach \$6.8 billion in 2012, and grow to \$7.7 billion in 2015'. However, the same figures show clear indications that physical media is far from down and out: 'By comparison, consumer spending on physical music (CDs and LPs) is expected to slide from approximately \$15 billion in 2010 to about \$10 billion in 2015.'

So that's a rise of some 30 per cent in online music sales and a fall of around 33 per cent in CDs and LPs, but then – if the *Gramophone* steam abacus doesn't fail me – those figures also suggest online accounted for some 28 per cent of the total market last year and will



be 43 per cent of the total in 2015. In other words, far from the CD being a dodo within the year, it'll still account for the majority of the market four years from now.

And it's not hard to see why, quite apart from the huge installed base of CD-playing hardware, from dedicated players to DVD and Blu-ray machines, and even computers. The majority of music available online, legally or otherwise, is at relatively low resolution: 320kbps MP3 is the exception rather than the rule, with most content at 192kbps or less. Yes, there are some labels offering content at CD quality in FLAC, or even higher resolution in some cases, but heavens does it take a long time to download, unless you are one of the very few lucky enough to have superfast broadband running into your home.

I'm getting to the point where I'm seriously considering an upgrade from my current 8Mbps service to the 100Mb Virgin is now offering in our area, just to get rid of the interminable wait I have every time I want to download some music. But that means an extra £40-something per month, on top of the music I buy – and at that point waiting a day or so for the mail-order envelope to pop through the door doesn't seem too bad. **G**



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# NOTES & LETTERS

Boult's Busoni • Menuhin, viola player • A towering Figaro • Whither English music?

## The fullness of Faust

I was present at the Royal Festival Hall on November 13, 1959, for that performance by Boult of *Doktor Faust*, and still have the programme – a good one-and-sixpence-worth for its time, with photos of Fischer-Dieskau as Faust in Berlin and Busoni, and seven pages of text including a biographical note by Edward Dent and a full synopsis of the opera. As I recall, it was a full-length concert although, from the provisional timings given in the programme, and in comparison with Philippe Jordan's Zurich DVD, there must have been sizeable cuts made in the two Prologues and in scenes 2 and 3; Boult also omitted the opening *Symphonia* and *Poem*, and the *Intermezzo*. But we still had over 100 minutes of music, so that the LPO CD issue must make major omissions from what we then heard. Mike Ashman (November, page 90) writes of Boult's 'concert suite of nuggets' which does less than justice to what lingers in the memory as a genuine opera-in-concert experience, with Fischer-Dieskau supported by a starry British cast of that time.

John Busbridge

Willesden, Broadwater, Glos, UK

## Dawn over Genoa

As a distinguished fertility expert, Prof Winston (My Music, November, page 138) knows better than anyone where babies come from, yet he seems confused about Amelia Boccanegra's provenance.

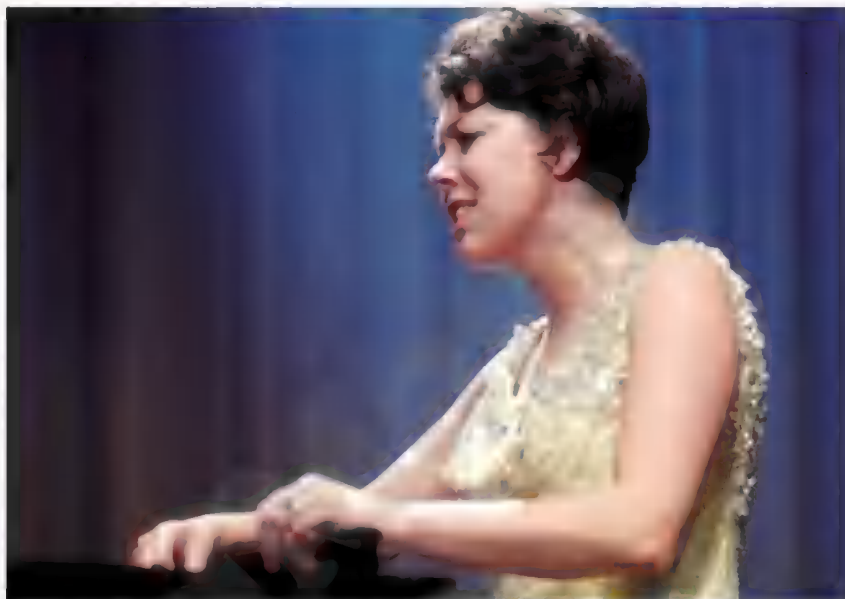
After more than 30 years of loving *Simon Boccanegra* I still have trouble remembering its plot but I do know that Amelia's aria can't possibly, as Prof Winston claims, catch 'the light over Venice'. That's because she is on the opposite coast of Italy, on the shore in Genoa.

Yebuda Shapiro, via email

## Menuhin on viola

Following Charlotte Smith's excellent article in October, Joseph Friedman wrote (Letters, November) to draw attention to two accomplished contemporary viola players. It is often overlooked, however, that violinists, such as Pinchas Zukerman and Nigel Kennedy, have also shown great proficiency as viola players. Yehudi Menuhin was an exceptionally fine player

## Letter of the Month



Dame Janet Baker: somewhere between soprano and contralto

## Dame Janet Baker – and Gramophone societies

After I completed my National Service in the Royal Artillery in 1952 I started to take *Gramophone* and have read every issue since then. From the days of 78s it has been of enormous help in amassing a huge collection of music, as well as entertaining in itself with articles and rare photographs.

In the Awards issue I was surprised to find that Dame Janet Baker was described as a mezzo-soprano when receiving the Lifetime Achievement awards. When the young Janet went to Saga Records for her first recording contract, Frederick Youens, my dear friend for almost 50 years, was recording manager and at the end of the session he asked her how she wished to be billed on the record sleeve. She responded by saying, 'You have noticed, haven't you, that my voice lies somewhere between soprano and contralto.'

Fred had noticed and they agreed that the sleeve should just say 'Janet Baker sings Schumann, Schubert and Brahms' with a large photograph on the front and the

words of the songs with English translations on the reverse side.

Throughout her wonderful career she has taken advantage of her voice and given marvellous performances in both mezzo and contralto roles for our delight. I still often return to that first Saga record to listen to the young, fresh and unique voice that started that career. Thank you, Fred Youens and Dame Janet.

Fred, alas no longer with us, was one of the four founders of the National Federation of Gramophone Societies in 1936 and whose efforts have made it possible for us to meet without fear of infringing copyright and public liability regulations. There may be readers, although like myself a little long in the tooth, who remember him and the lovely recorded concerts he put on.

May *Gramophone* and the now Federation of Recorded Music Societies continue to flourish together.

Murray Nash  
Cowley, Uxbridge, Middx, UK

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of the instrument, as his recordings of Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* with Colin Davis and the Walton Concerto with the composer demonstrate. Some readers may recall that Menhuin made an LP recording for EMI of the two Brahms viola sonatas with Louis Kentner. These performances have never appeared on CD, and because they were, in my view, among the most impressive that have ever been committed to tape, I would urge EMI to reissue them.

Keith Pearce

Penzance, Cornwall, UK

## More on opera productions

I have read Mr Sheehan's letter about opera productions (November) following my own on the subject (October). I would observe that the titles you have chosen to give both letters in no way reflect the opinions contained therein. Much better would have been 'Inappropriate opera productions'.

So many theatres, producers and set designers seem to assume that all audiences have seen operas so often that, although they are prepared to listen to the music as before, they will wish to see a spectacle on stage that has little or no connection with the original. Surely the mark of a great or even a competent production is that it complements the music and presents and comments on the plot intelligibly. If not, then why not just create a new work where everything fits together around a chosen theme?

We can all think about American roadside cafés, construction cranes, railway footbridges, broken-down cars, etc, etc. The skill is to ensure that what one chooses

to do truly enhances the original work. This is not to say that updated, transposed or contemporary presentations cannot work. Some do notably well but too many do not. In recent years I have seen, for example, hilarious modern versions of *L'heure espagnole* and *Il turco in Italia* at Covent Garden and a wonderful *L'elisir d'amore* from Glyndebourne. So often the producers seem to be saying 'Let's do something different at any cost' or 'I have had this idea so which opera can I fit it into'. This cannot be the way to approach stage presentation of well-established works or to encourage new members of an audience.

After a very good series of programmes designed to encourage a greater interest in opera, the BBC decided to end with a complete performance of *Aida*, which should have been an ideal work for first-time viewers. Unbelievably, they chose to present a truly extraordinary production from Bregenz which must have left almost everyone bemused from the very first bar of the prelude.

John Harington Hawes, via email

## For the high jump

I have been reading Richard Lawrence's article on recordings of *Le nozze di Figaro* with quite some interest (Collection, Awards issue, page 70). At the end I was rather disappointed because he did not consider Peter Sellars's fabulous production on Decca (1990). It is so incredibly full of joy and inspiration that it would be a shortcoming if it was not mentioned to your readers. To give an idea: Sellars located action at Trump Tower, 52 floors above Fifth Avenue. One can imagine what this meant for Cherubino's jumping out of the window!

I do not feel competent in evaluating artistic qualities of the US and Austrian teams. Nevertheless, the music is so fabulous that it wouldn't be damaged, whatever the quality of the musicians.

Werner Hansen

Munich, Germany

## An English renaissance?

During the second half of the last century, many of us were hailing the works of our leading composers in forming an exciting English renaissance of music, as the symphonic cycles of Arnold, Alwyn, Bax, Rubbra, Tippett and Vaughan Williams, together with other major pieces by Bliss, Butterworth, Finzi, Ireland, Moeran and Rawsthorne and a long list of other composers, caught the public imagination. Now it seems that only music by Elgar,

Britten and Delius are likely to be included in the published concert prospectuses in the capital that have been prepared for the coming year, and as long as it's just *The Planets* and *Belshazzar's Feast* then Holst and Walton can be included in 2012. The remainder of the major works of these two fine composers are ignored.

For Vaughan Williams, despite inspiring a very active society that produces its own records, there is very little hope of hearing any of his compositions in London in the coming year. Just an ascending *Lark* on the Southbank is listed for January, while absolutely none of his superb symphonies are being programmed at the combined venues there. By contrast, his Russian contemporaries Shostakovich and Prokofiev dominate much of the scene for no obvious reason.

The same situation exists at the Barbican in the BBC Symphony Orchestra's survey. Having dropped him completely from the Proms last summer, it naturally follows that his works are regularly absent from daytime listening on Radio 3 these days.

We are therefore very fortunate that the major companies continue to maintain issues of a wide range of recordings of British masterpieces in their catalogues at the present time. Lyrita led the way in the first instance with their refreshing and enterprising British bias that included the fine Piano Concerto of William Hurlstone, a major discovery in my view. Coupled with the wide-ranging survey of British chamber works recorded by the Maggini Quartet on Naxos and the recent recording of Vaughan Williams's Piano Fantasy by Somm, the recording companies in general seem the most likely to preserve the fading reputation of that English renaissance for the future. They are setting an excellent example and now it is really up to the concert promoters to follow suit.

John Tebbit

Slough, Berks, UK

## NEXT MONTH

Jeremy Dibble looks at Delius the cosmopolitan and follows his career as he travelled from Yorkshire to America and back to Europe

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Vaughan Williams: absent from London?



# OBITUARIES

Two sopranos who were active in contrasting musical worlds



Lux feminae: Catalan soprano Montserrat Figueras

## MONTSERRAT FIGUERAS

*Early music soprano*

*Born March 15, 1942*

*Died November 23, 2011*

Montserrat Figueras, the Catalan soprano renowned for performances of early music, and wife of Jordi Savall, has died aged 69.

Together with her husband, the violist and conductor, they greatly enriched the early music scene with their explorations of the music and culture of their Spanish heritage, and beyond, through their ensemble Hespèrion XX (later XXI) and their own label Alia Vox. Followers of their work came to expect, and were rewarded with, musically thrilling performances rich in vitality and exploratory inventiveness. Figueras's beautiful, characterful soprano was a central part of how this music of another age, and often culture, could feel so timeless for a modern audience.

The label became known for beautifully recorded and presented releases of thoughtfully curated thematic projects, not just of Spanish music but exploring the links between early music and other areas and genres, whether of Europe or regions including the Middle East. 'When Montserrat and I worked on our first project together in the 1970s,' Savall told *Gramophone* a few months ago, in an interview for our November edition, 'we were conscious that Spain's medieval heritage resulted from the co-existence of three distinct cultures – Christianity, Judaism and Islam – which you can still see

today in the language, the architecture, and Spanish and Catalan culture generally... We felt it our duty to make a space for these cultures alongside more familiar repertoire.'

The eclecticism of their work – or rather, the drawing out of thematic links – is well indicated by just some of the recent Alia Vox projects Figueras worked on: 'Hispania & Japan' (11/11), 'Dinastia Borgia' (an exploration of the Borgia Dynasty through music – 2/11), and 'Jérusalem' (4/09), a musical homage to the city.

But while very much at the heart of those wonderful collaborative endeavours, she was acclaimed in her own right too. One of her recent recordings, from 2006, 'Lux feminae' (10/06), was a presentation of femininity though might also have served as a demonstration of Figueras's remarkable versatility. As *Gramophone*'s critic Mary Berry wrote at the time: 'She can be dramatic or passionate, facetious or sorrowful; a young girl who wants her freedom and is only restrained with difficulty, and a saintly soul in a mystical union with God.'

In 2008 Figueras, along with her husband, was named UNESCO 'Artist for Peace' in recognition of her championing of the concept of music as a shared language between cultures. More recently, in April, she was awarded Catalonia's highest honour, the Cross of Sant Jordi, in recognition of her achievements in early music.

## SENA JURINAC

*Soprano*

*Born October 24, 1921*

*Died November 22, 2011*

The Croatian-Austrian soprano Sena Jurinac has died in Germany; she was 90.

After study at the Zagreb Academy of Music she made her debut in the city as Mimì and soon moved on to roles such as the *Figaro* Countess and Freia, and she created the role of Isabella in Werner Egk's *Columbus* (1942). In 1944 she joined the Vienna State Opera company and changed her name from Srebrenka to Sena, apparently at the suggestion of Karl Böhm's secretary. War delayed her State Opera debut and she finally appeared there in 1946 as Cherubino.

She was first heard in London in 1946 (as Dorabella) when the Vienna State Opera company toured, and she sang at the Salzburg Festival the following year. During the 1950s she was a frequent visitor to

England, appearing both at Covent Garden and at Glyndebourne (where she sang many of the principal Mozart roles). Her Countess and Ilia were both recorded by EMI; *Figaro* under Gui and *Idomeneo* under Fritz Busch.

Jurinac's voice hovered between soprano and mezzo, and she sang roles written for both voice-types, so she performed the three roles in *Der Rosenkavalier* (her portrayal of Octavian is captured in the Paul Czinner/Karajan film), as well as the Composer (*Ariadne*), both Marzelline and Leonore (in *Fidelio* – a wonderful live recording under Klemperer has been issued on Testament), Marie (*Wozzeck*), Pamina, Tosca, and Marina and Fyodor (*Boris Godunov*).

In a *Gramophone* interview with Alan Blyth in May 1990, Sena Jurinac spoke with warmth of many of the conductors with whom she worked: Fritz Busch ('He was very tough with me altogether but he was a real Svengali. Had he lived longer, I think I would have had more confidence in myself'), Karajan, Krips and Klemperer.

Alan Blyth, who saw her many times, commented: 'When Jurinac was on stage, you knew instinctively that your heart, like hers, was to be involved and not just your intellect. It is a precious and unlearnable gift. Amazingly enough, her records convey much of this – or they do at least to those of us lucky enough to complement the voice with the treasured memories of her stage appearances. Thank goodness, she is conveying as much of her art as is transferable to a new generation of singers. They should heed her advice.'



Precious and unlearnable gifts: Sena Jurinac



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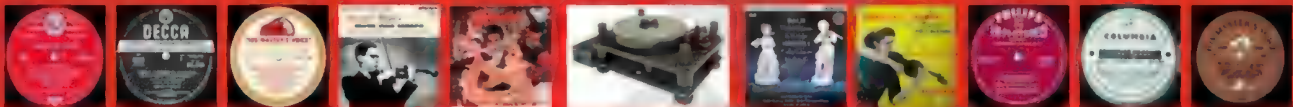
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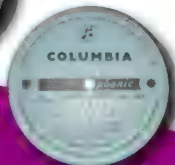
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# David Shilling

The milliner, famous for his bizarre hats at Royal Ascot, reflects on the role music plays in his life

**T**he first classical concerts I remember were in Monaco where, as a child, I was holidaying with my parents. They were held in the courtyard of the Prince's Palace, where I witnessed the likes of Karajan and Solti. The location was a visual treat, with its grand sweeping staircase, and all beautifully lit. Those early concerts and the romance of it all must have had a profound effect on me as I now live just opposite the palace!

**As I am dedicated** to the visual arts, my passion is for performance, especially ballet. I love romantic works and during the celebrations for the Ballets Russes centenary in 2010 I went to some dozen different productions of *L'après-midi d'un faune* and each was unique and special. The success of the Ballets Russes was amazing, but Diaghilev's company was so innovative and the sensational and avant-garde music so strong. At an auction at Sotheby's during the '70s I was lucky enough to acquire some costumes from the Ballets Russes and two are designs by Léon Bakst for *The Sleeping Beauty*. Ironically, late in his career Diaghilev turned to a more classical style and these Bakst costumes reflect that, with masses of brocade and gilt decoration. You expect avant-garde from Bakst but these are very Regency-style, pinks, golds – very Mozartian in fact.

**This is perfect for me** as I identify with Mozart – in the way, that is, that he is so gloriously portrayed by Tom Hulse in the film *Amadeus*! This has forever coloured my vision of the composer and his wonderful wigs. There was a pink one I particularly coveted. I'll never forget a showing one night at the Open Air Cinema here – probably the largest outdoor screen in Europe, set across the ancient walls of Monaco's prison. As the film began, a storm was setting in and, as the wind became ever stronger, the silk of the screen billowed in tune with the deterioration in Mozart's life – a strange, unrepeatable experience.

**Ballet is my great love**, though. When I was growing up I was as enthralled watching Rudolf Nureyev dancing as I was dancing myself to disco beats at Studio 54. I was at Nureyev's premiere of *Raymonda* in London and also saw him dancing for fun on the beach in Monte Carlo! Luciano Pavarotti wasn't so impressive. I was once on stage with him in Modena, where he had invited me to support the War Child charity. Our first meeting was scheduled to be a live television show together, but when his entourage showed there was a commotion about the seating arrangements and a *pièce de théâtre* which proceeded in true Italian style. When the maestro finally appeared he did not sing for the cameras...and nor did I! We talked – or rather he talked and I nodded from time to time – as I don't speak any Italian! Then, with the benefit of a simultaneous translation, I talked about my hats. Pavarotti never sang a single note until the concluding dinner for 30 or 40 of us on the last night. The wine was flowing and when he sang 'Nessun Dorma' the place exploded. He was an extraordinary man with an extraordinary ego.



ILLUSTRATION: PHILIP BANNISTER



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**Having lived in Monaco** for 10 years I have now written a play, *Rich Isn't Easy*, which follows four protagonists through the trials and tribulations of their high-profile lives. I have used a mix from Borodin and Johann Strauss to Charlie Winston and Marilyn Monroe, Manu Chao and Cher. I am currently developing the screenplay.

**Musical themes have often** been important in my work: I once made a hat for my mother, Gertrude Shilling, to wear at Royal Ascot with the brim shaped like a piano keyboard – we loved black and white! But until recently I had never tried writing music. This summer, though, I was asked to make an installation for the Cannes Film Festival, which I couldn't resist calling 'Watering Can(ne)s'. I asked a violinist friend, Oli Langford, to help put a recorded work into the installation and together we came up with some ideas for a piece of music that would reflect what will happen when we run out of water. Oli did all the work – writing, creating and performing the piece, which he called 'Aquafied', and, although it was intended to be site specific, I actually play it in my atelier and I love it. It lasts an hour and mixes violin harmonics, voice, piano, whale harp, bowed cymbals and synthesisers. It made me realise at last that writing music and making visual art are not that different. You take a bit of this and a bit of that, give it a new twist and there you have it, an original work of art! **G**





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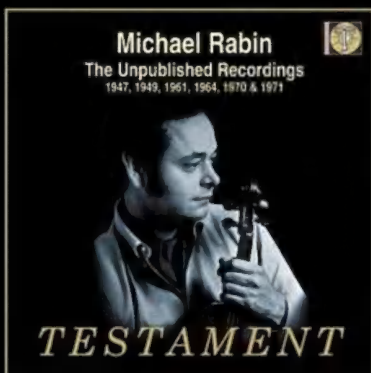


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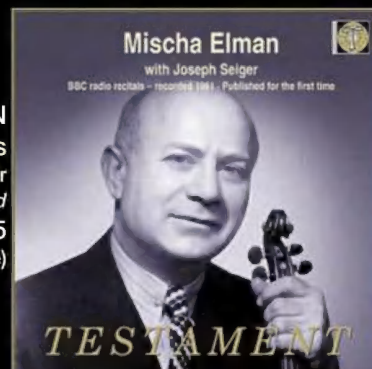
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